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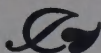


HONOUR THY MOTHER

Honour thy Mother

By Father Alexander, O.F.M.

Author of "The Catholic Home," "The Way of Youth,"
"A Spiritual Retreat," "A Mother's Letters,"
etc.



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DEDICATED
TO ALL WHO
WHETHER TEMPORALLY IN THE HOME
OR SPIRITUALLY IN THE CLOISTER
BEAR
THE HALLOWED NAME OF
MOTHER

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HONOUR THY MOTHER

PART I

MY MOTHER

IT is to be feared that only late in life does the above divine command come home to us with arresting force. It cries, "Halt!" and suggests the need of deeper reflection on our origin. From childhood the command was known, and, more or less, observed; but laws may be known, and in routine fashion observed, without one's spirit being stirred to its depths. This is a command which was surely meant to stir man's soul profoundly, yet how seldom is the divine wish fully realised. In boyhood or girlhood the shallowness of experience precludes deep reasoning, even where vital truths are at stake; in adolescence, when so many cross-currents of passion are each striving for mastery, the command to honour one's mother is oft swept aside by conflicting emotions; in maturity, when one's moorings are so often found far from the old home, interests that are ever near and pressing weaken the force of the divine command. So it comes to pass that the honour due to her who brought us into the world, and whose influence shaped our lives, is seldom fully understood until those lives are well-nigh spent. Arrested at last by the command *Honour thy mother*, we wake up to the fact that we have lived and—after a manner—loved without fully appreciating the sublimity of the task

imposed on us. In perfunctory fashion, we have honoured and obeyed, but never with that zeal and high purpose which the obligation demands. In one word, we have not dwelt on the deep mystery of motherhood.

Let us now make amends. Let us strive to repair our past neglect and ingratitude. It may be that she who brought us into the world has, long since, been gathered into God's kingdom, yet her spirit, looking down, will bless us for our pains, and she will feel that her mission on earth was not in vain. Placing ourselves in God's presence, let us, individually, reason thus: In awaking to the call of God to honour my mother—the woman who bore me—the first thing that strikes me is the fact of my existence. *I am*. Yet I might not have been! Seeing that I exist, it must needs be because of God's decree, for he alone is the author of life. "He made us, and not we ourselves" (Ps. xcix 3). "Thy hands have made me" (Job x 8). But, in the working out of that decree, the decisive factor was a woman's fiat. That woman was my mother. Her fiat having been given, a new life pulsed within her. That life was mine. "Honour thy father, and forget not the groanings of thy mother. Remember that thou hadst not been born but through them: and make a return to them as they have done for thee" (Ecclus. vii 29, 30).

So not without reason does God impose on me the duty of honouring my mother. He, the living God, chose and appointed her to co-operate, as a secondary cause, with himself—the great First Cause—in his creative work. To manifest his power as Creator, God co-operated with the creature. In this he honoured my mother beyond all my power of description. So should I—the fruit of that co-operation. To think that I, abject and unknown, was yet the

object of the Creator's solicitude ! To think that my mother, then young and unsophisticated, hidden and obscure, was yet visited by and privileged by Omnipotence ! No longer dare I wonder at the words addressed to the young Tobias by his father : " Hear, my son, the words of my mouth, and lay them, as a foundation, in thy heart. When God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body : and thou shalt honour thy mother all the days of her life : for thou must be mindful what and how great perils she suffered for thee in her womb " (Tob. iv 2-4). Nor can there be any doubt about the reward which will be given to the observant child : " He that honoureth his mother is as one that layeth up a treasure " (Ecclus. iii 6). Indeed, apart from the prospect of a future reward, what greater treasure could one possess than the consciousness of being identified with the Creator in honouring the mother whom *he* so honoured ? If world-wide and epoch-recurring honour is paid to those who conceived masterpieces in soulless marble, is God, into whose masterpiece has been infused an immortal soul, to be forgotten ? He himself gives the answer, for in the charge, " Thou shalt honour thy mother," he deems that through her, as co-operatrix with him in his creative work, supreme honour will be paid to himself.

Mere man that I am, I cannot hope to fathom the depths of a mother's soul, but, inasmuch as I am ■ son, how ingrate I should be if I tried not to penetrate as deeply as I may into its recesses ! For how can I pay my debt of honour unless I understand ? Never shall I fully understand. Full understanding is reserved to those alone who bear the title *Mother*. And mothers, of all the members of their sex, are the most reticent. Like Mary, they keep " all these things " in their hearts. They are deemed too sacred for words.

My sole comfort is that even an attempt at understanding will enlighten the darkness of my mind, deepen my gratitude, and prompt to acts of honour. Mere man that I am, I yet know, in a humble and remote way, what it means to conceive. A germ thought enters the mind, fixes itself there, gathers unto itself contributions from many sources, assimilates them, and, in the course of time, my mind is delivered of a message. The interval between conception and delivery may be months or years, but during all the time the destined message was hugged to my inmost soul. It was brooded over by day, dreamt of by night, speculated on with unseen ministering spirits (whose aid I invoked), and humbly committed to the care of God, without whom I knew that I could do nothing of lasting value. The anticipated message was likewise discussed with intimate friends on whose reverent interest I could reckon. Conjectures as to its reception or rejection by the outside world haunted me, and, all the while that I moved amongst men and was doomed to the daily routine of duty, that which my mind had conceived became an obsession. Day by day it clamoured with ever-increasing insistency for delivery. Within me I could feel its impatient strugglings for release: strugglings which might be translated into language—"When shall I be delivered and free to diffuse myself abroad? When, O parent of mine, will you judge it wise to endure the wrench of parting with the offspring of your mind?" Then came the hour of labour wherein the author parted with the fruit of his brain—an hour of joy, because a new message was delivered to the world, an hour of sorrow because that which was hitherto part of his inmost self was now severed from him and committed to the criticism of a world which, unmindful of the writer's mental throes, discussed it in purely impersonal fashion.

If you and I have had such experiences in connection with ordinary conceptions of the mind, we, to some extent, can appreciate the throes of master-minds—the intellectual parents of works destined to endure for all time. Granted a noble theme and a powerful brain the ecstasy of conception is far beyond all power of adequate description. We lesser men can but look up with awe. Confronted with the sublime, speech is silenced.

Now every child is a message to the world. But oh, the wonders of its evolution! To understand my mother's soul so as to render all the honour that God proclaims to be due, I must—impossible though it would seem—try to gauge her feelings. I can imagine her saying: "God has taken away my reproach. Far from consigning me to the cold shadows of barrenness, he has blessed me with fertility. Oh, how I revere and adore his creative power! How jealously and gratefully I shall guard its fruit! Truly, but at a reverent distance, I can say with our Blessed Mother: 'He that is mighty hath done great things in me, and holy is his name.' Oh, what a privilege is mine in co-operating with him for the provision of a new subject for his kingdom! Oh, what an honour to be his ambassadress in equipping a new messenger for the world—nay, who may be chosen, as St Francis was, to be a herald of the great King! Oh, what a glorious task is mine, to provide the habitation wherein will dwell the Spirit of God! To reproduce myself—for my child will be bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh! O God, may all within me contribute to his strength of limb, elevation of soul, purity of heart, nobility of character, holiness of life."

From that supreme hour I picture my mother's outlook on life. But yesterday she looked out on it blankly, but now her eyes sparkle, for she beholds all kinds of possibilities. The child she is bearing is, to

her, at once a telescope and a microscope—for her vision is widened, and at the same time concentrated. No intelligent mother can conceive without adding to her mental stature. Repeated union of her will with the adorable will of God produces a type of womanhood that elicits the admiration of all. By her fruits she is known, for, as a rule, the children of later years surpass in intelligence those who have preceded. Through her yet unborn child, my mother now regarded all things within and without herself. Within, she reasoned that her thoughts must be wholesome and her ambitions high and holy—for would not her mental equipment react on her child? Her view of God's omnipotence was exalted, for, imitative of the mother of the Machabees, she exclaimed: "I have had so little to do with this stupendous work." Nor can I imagine any Christian mother bearing a child without developing an extraordinary devotion to Mary, Mother of God.

Even as a germ thought attracts to itself all that can minister to its growth and quickens one's powers of observation and assimilation, so was it, I should like to believe, with my mother. Looking out on the world and pondering over men's manifold activities, her mind must have been keenly alive to the possibilities that awaited her yet unborn child. History tells us of the inspiration given to men by the partners of their joys and sorrows. Whence comes that inspiration? From woman's remarkable intuitive vision. If interested in the welfare of one who is her other self, how much more interested must she be in one who, for a prolonged period, is *part* of herself! How she will love to conjure up for him the best of all good things that can be won in the world. "My child! what will he become?" she asks. And the echo in her heart answers: "Under God, that most depends on you who bear him."

Thus passed the fateful months, and I, yet unborn, was all unconscious of the wealth of thought lavished on me. They were months beset with hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, ecstasy mingled with pain and distress; but, in the truly Christian mother, they meant closer proximity to God, who was more and more acknowledged as the Supreme Arbiter of life and death. That nearness to God brought with it a deeper sense of responsibility, a serener view of life, a greater trust in divine Providence, a surer grasp of his power. Granted a foundation of practical faith, I can well conceive all kindred virtues growing apace with the consciousness of life within her. Who dare attempt a description of its first manifestation? Here, again, mothers' lips are sealed. Awe strikes them dumb. They can but hold their breath as they listen to the subconscious prayer offered up in the silence of the heart: "Thanks be to God, the giver! My child announces its presence." We, too, with a reverence due to this hidden evolution, must hold our breath, contenting ourselves with saying: "Oh, how great the honour due to her who, for our sake, bore patiently the weary months of waiting! Honour to her whose mind, all the while, was concentrated on our well-being. Honour to her who with ever-increasing interest and solicitude listened in to the wireless messages we, all unconsciously, transmitted. Honour to her who, trusting to a return of gratitude which, alas, is not always paid and even when paid is never adequate, may have risked her life in presenting us to the outside world." Our Blessed Lord speaks of that supreme moment in the life of mother and child, otherwise I should not dare intrude on a domain wherein, no matter *what* a mother suffers, she offers all in silent thanksgiving to God for his gift. "A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because

her hour is come: but when she hath brought forth the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (St John xvi 21).

Yet the insensate world, while raising monuments to men whose claim to honour rests largely on their lust for blood, seldom or never thinks of crowning with laurel the women—more than martyrs—who heroically face the ordeal of motherhood. Let us—children all, no matter how old we have grown—make good the defect. Let our hearts dilate in honouring those without whom, in the existing economy of nature, we could not have been.

My reflections, so far, remind me of my createdness and bring into high relief the fact that God thought of *me*, irrespective altogether of the whole outside world. I am, moreover, face to face with the startling fact that my mother sank all her personal feelings, fears, prejudices, and tastes in the deep well of conformity to the divine will. *Her* fiat made it possible for God's creative wish to be gratified. I read into her life unselfish, unswerving faith, surrendering herself as she did to pain, drudgery, sleepless nights and anxious days, supported only by a hazy prospect of gratitude being afterwards shown: a prospect which, alas, so often remains unfulfilled. For only the few ponder deeply over a mother's love, and those few only when the object of their affections is far removed from interest in the acts of gratitude which would fain be paid.

Oh, how well founded is God's command: "*Honour thy mother*"! And what a vista of thought is spread out for all who would dare contravene his creative purposes, thus robbing him of the honour which accrues to him when his sanctions in holy matrimony are reverently fulfilled; robbing woman of the glory which, by divine decree, is her portion in child-bearing;

robbing the world of children who were intended to pay honour; robbing heaven of souls whom God intended to be co-heirs with Christ, and thus perpetual adorers of his eternal Fatherhood.

What sayest thou, Woman, who, empowered to yield
 Choice fruits for earth and souls elect for Heaven,
 Art but intent on snatching carnal joys—
 Contemptuous of the end for which they're given ?
 O fear that he, who 'listed thee as aid
 To his creative aims, will smite thee down
 As once a fig-tree, garnished e'en as thou,
 Was shrivelled under Christ's avenging frown.

* * * * *

Although I have no personal recollection of the initial years of my independent life, my observation, nevertheless, enables me to strike the personal note. From what I have seen in the average Catholic home I can reason validly about my mother's love, for I am still in quest of the reasons which justify God's command: *Honour thy mother*. True, she is long since dead, but even now the all-merciful Father may allow her spirit to find solace in the knowledge that an honour, never fully paid while she lived, is yet transmitted to her in the region where a thousand years are as a day and a day as a thousand years.

I behold her ecstasy in pressing to her bosom the gift of God, hitherto concealed within that bosom, but now disclosed to her wondering eyes. Always sacred to her, even in its embryonic state, its sacredness was enhanced when she found herself charged with the care of its independent life. Enraptured, she looked on me, and said: "God's child and mine!" Her fiat had co-operated with that of the Creator: the link between God and herself being the husband of her choice. The fruit of that co-operation was now in her arms. A new link was forged to bind her to God and to her husband, that link being her child.

Visions which, hitherto, had been shadowy now assumed form, for sex distinction enabled her to conjure up distinct possibilities. Her day dreams were provided with scaffolding, and no castles in Spain were ever more wonderful than those built, furnished, and adorned by my mother. In all of them I was the central figure. Every child is the hero or heroine of a thousand maternal dreams.

My mother, true to her Catholic traditions, remembering that, so far, I was a child of God only by nature, hastened to have me made a child of his by grace. When, fresh from the font, I was restored to her arms she welcomed me as a golden link between the *household* and its God, for she knew that habitual grace was now the *sure* possession of at least one of its inmates. The knowledge deepened her gratitude for the gift of obedience to divine law—an obedience fruitful not only in the natural but in the supernatural order. I can well imagine how, until I reached the age of reason, her Catholic heart went up to God in thanksgiving for the gift of grace bestowed on the home through her child, and how earnestly she prayed that, after the dawn of reason, the gift might never be lost.

Prudent woman that she was, my mother knew that habitual grace dwelt in a soul whose powers were weakened through original sin, and that bodily members had been deprived of preternatural gifts. She did not present original sin as a "bogey" to frighten me—*pace* modern "scientists" and "educationists"—but, in firm yet delicate ways, she strove to bring my fallen nature into tune with the Infinite, to make the flesh subservient to the spirit. She waited not until passion, rushing through my veins, should threaten to sweep away the knowledge of my divine origin and my supernatural end; but in words adapted to my intelligence she spoke to me of

God in unity and trinity, of Jesus my Redeemer, of Mary my heavenly Mother, and of the angel who had me in his keeping. My soul, then full of sanctifying grace, was adapted to imbibe those divine truths, and their reception, when my mind was plastic, disposed me later on to a Christian docility foreign to the mere child of nature. Since then, teachers have expanded, preachers have expounded, and authors have discussed those sublime themes, but all that I have heard or read has seemed strangely familiar, echoes or summaries of fundamental truths heard long ago from the lips of one who, of all others, had the readiest access to the child mind.

Nor did that maternal solicitude end when the leading strings which bound me to home and kindred were snapped. It followed me all through her life and meant for me efficacious pleadings before the throne of God, light in darkness, sage advice in doubt, courage under trials, encouragement in difficulties, and a sure refuge in failure or in fault. Only few fathers in history are found emulative of the father in the parable, whereas most mothers welcome back the prodigal with a kiss. St Augustine (*Confessions*, Book III, xi) gives his own experience: "And thou didst send thy hand from above and drewest my soul out of that profound darkness, my mother, thy faithful one, weeping to thee for me, more than mothers weep the bodily deaths of their children. For she, by that faith and spirit which she had from thee, discerned the death wherein I lay, and thou didst hear her, O Lord. Thou didst hear her, and didst not despise her tears when, streaming down, they watered the ground under her eyes in every place where she prayed."

To the query, "Can a mother forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb?" (Isa. xlix 15) God, although suggesting the possibility

of forgetfulness, yet seems to expect an imperative and everlasting negative. I use the term "everlasting" advisedly, for it is inconceivable that she who bore and nurtured a child in the interests of the Creator should forget the fruit of her obedience, now that she has been called to receive her reward. Will she not rather pray that her child may so persevere as to become a jewel in her heavenly crown?

If I am exposing myself to the charge of idealising my mother, I glory in it. Although conscious that my mother must have sinned in Adam (for all of us are sinners), yet, inasmuch as many mothers rank as canonised saints, it is evident that the ideal can be reached. Who would not wish to believe that it was reached by the woman who bore him? And, as the wish is father to the thought, who could refuse to think it credible that his mother *did* reach the ideal? So it comes to this, that if, in life, I happen to be honoured, I should feel guilty of dishonesty and hypocrisy if, in accepting the honour, I excluded grateful memories of the mother without whose fostering care I could not have attained to it. If, among men, I am in any way useful, be it known to them that the first steps towards usefulness in all directions were inspired and guided by my mother. Hence all honours offered should by me be spurned if I found them accompanied by real or implied lack of recognition of her to whom, under God, I owe so much.

When, therefore, I hear of notable deeds done in any sphere of human activity, my mind, instinctively, travels back to their source. Does someone electrify his hearers by oratory, or fascinate by his writings, or hold spectators spellbound by a work of art, or ravish the ears of connoisseurs by his music, I picture the hero as a tiny child lisping his first syllables into the willing ears of his mother, or learning his letters by her

knee, or proudly holding up his first rude sketch for her approbation, or humming his first tune for her applause. Do I read of the daring achievements of pioneers in strange lands, of the redoubtable deeds of heroes on sea or land, of the martyrdom of men for some worthy cause, I seem to find the germ in the lessons of kindness and self-denial imparted long ago by the mother who, as we have seen, conjured up for her child even greater glories than he can ever achieve on earth.

And even when, alas, those dreams are never realised and failure dogs the steps of men as far as the ignominious scaffold, the mother will be found at its foot, prepared to share in the obloquy of her son if only, by her presence, she can win back his soul to God. All uncomplaining, she offers him as a sacrifice to justice, praying that the holocaust, through the merits of Christ, may expiate his crimes. Other kindred, fearful of taint, flee the unhallowed spot, but she remains to the bitter end. In death, as in life, the mother is faithful. "Can a mother forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb?" (Isa. xlix 15).*

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It would be wrong to imagine that one who sets out to eulogise his mother does so at the expense of his father. A father's position in the life of his children is more than assured. He transmits to them his name, trusting that it will be passed on, without reproach, to future generations. They hold him in honour and awe, for he looms up before them as typifying law and order and as the ultimate dispenser of domestic justice. The terrors of his tribunal are mitigated by the plead-

* As the above lines were being penned, a young man, aged twenty-six, was executed at Hull. His poor mother spent the preceding night in prayer, outside the prison gates.

ings of the mother. The father lays down the law—the mother, in her own persuasive way, shows the unwilling child how reasonable it is. The father, in his search for fame or bread, is often exiled from the home—the mother is for ever identified with it. The father, no matter how deep his love, is always detached in its manifestation—the mother's love is intimate, affective, responsive to every chord in the heart of the child she so well knows. In God's providence the child, having been so long identified with mother before birth, so closely attached to her bosom in infancy, so subject to her care in childhood, so conscious of her solicitude in adolescent years, cannot think of home but in terms of *Mother*. And a father, worthy of his name, is never jealous of the honour paid her, for, in his inmost heart, he knows that it redounds to his own credit. Did not he *choose* her for her honoured position in the household? Did not he smile approval when he found her exercising all those maternal devices by which the mother wins her way to the innermost recesses of the child's heart? Did he not mentally admit his own inaptitude for those endearing wiles? Does not he realise that his task as lawgiver is rendered lighter because of the loyal support of his wife, mother of his children? For she is ever insistent that the ultimate goal of her children's love is the father to whom, as her lawful husband, she clings and without whom, under God, she could not have won her priceless gifts. "Honour thy father, and forget not the groanings of thy mother. Remember that thou hadst not been born but through them: and make ■ return to them as they have done for thee" (Ecclus. vii 29, 30).

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The pity is that, in too many cases, long years pass o'er one's head ere he fully realises the magnitude of

his debt of honour and love: years of insouciant childhood, years of inconsiderate youth, years of calculating maturity—but when at length the light is given to grasp one's indebtedness, how heart and soul should be exercised in paying it to the full: *Honour thy mother*.

If, by a miracle, the child conceived had intimate and immediate consciousness of its creation, and was provided with some wonderful means of conveying its appreciation of all that was being done for its well-being by its mother, we cannot imagine that payment of the debt of gratitude would be deferred. For, in that case, neither impotence nor the distraction occasioned by outward influences could be pleaded as excuses for neglect. Surely the successive stages of development would immediately suggest adequate thanksgiving. No such miracle was wrought in us. Necessarily, therefore, the payment of the debt of honour and gratitude was postponed, but who should wish to confront his mother in that region of bliss where he hopes to meet her without feeling that—no matter how tardy in life—God's precept, *Honour thy mother*, had been amply fulfilled?

Following on these reflections, am I not justified in concluding that—

1. God's command that I should honour my mother, apart from its intrinsic importance as *his* command, is in perfect harmony with my *instinct* as her child.

2. The consideration of all that she has meant to me, physically, morally, and socially, appeals to my *reason* and justifies me in rendering her all the honour that is in my power. But for her, I could not have been. All my post-natal work has depended on her fiat.

3. The fact that I find myself speaking of home in

terms of *Mother* is no injustice to my father, for in speaking of race, of national or of public affairs, or of the specific business I have to do (in harmony with God's will), I always speak in terms of *Father*.

4. If, in *my affections*, I am attracted to my mother more than to my father, it is nevertheless true that, in all matters of public moment, my mother is never in evidence. She is then overshadowed by the name that I bear—and I am known to all as the son of my *father*. My public reticences regarding my mother are never construed by my fellow-men as derogatory to the sacredness of her place in my life.

5. Far from my father being jealous of the affective love I bear my mother, he is justly proud thereof, knowing as he does that I but follow an instinct implanted in my heart by the eternal Father.

So much is this the case that even the all-just and all-jealous God is himself disarmed when witness to the manifestation of this instinct. This, to my mind, is borne out by a tragic event in the life of an old and valued friend of mine. Overtaken by one of those strange "visitations" which are so puzzling to the casuist, he deemed that all was lost, and that, for him, non-existence would be preferable to the agony he had long endured. Waiving all the warnings of conscience with regard to deeper suffering in a *future* state, he determined to end his existence in *this*. In the dead hour of night, when all around was in gloom—short of trembling reflections of ship-lights in the waters chosen for his grave—he denuded himself of his clothing and cast from his neck the sacred badges which, from childhood, he had loved to wear—less through lack of faith than a sheer sense of unworthiness and despair. Dark indeed was the night, but infinitely darker was his soul, for although thoughts of God—Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier—presented

themselves to his mind, they brought no solace. All mental processes were paralysed by his fixed idea of self-destruction. With resolute step, he waded into the water and splashed on and on without finding the depth he longed for. When, as God and the angels knew, he had at length reached the limit of the shallows and another step would have precipitated him into the deep, he chanced to raise his eyes and looked into space. Lo ! As vividly as if he had been transported to her drawing-room, he saw a vision of his mother in her arm-chair, looking wistfully into his eyes. It was an arresting picture. Standing stock-still, with chattering teeth, he cried: "*I cannot do it ! 'Twould break her heart.*" He was saved from death and hell.

To me, the moral is clear: *God*, in that supreme moment, *was not jealous*. He had beheld himself and all his heavenly court virtually rejected, but at the sight of responsiveness to the instinct which he had implanted in that poor fellow's heart, and through the witness borne to his own command, "Honour thy mother," he, in his mercy, overlooked the aberration. In sending or in permitting the vision, God seemed to say: "Son, behold thy mother ! *I gave thee to her. For her sake, return to me !*"

Who can fathom the depths of the counsels of God in implanting this love of mother in the human breast ?

If that rescued soul in later life, in looking up into the eyes of God, exclaimed, "O heavenly Father, in that awful night *my mother saved me,*" can it be imagined that the Supreme Being would regard the exclamation as subversive of the homage due to himself ? Should we not rather think that he would approve, saying, "Yes, my child; in your dire distress, *I sent her to save*" ?

In fine, an unbiassed review of home life convinces us that, from the moment of conception until we are

laid out in death, the mother finds herself committed to unremitting care. She is the dispenser of all the good things provided by the eternal Father, and, coming through her tender hands, the gifts are enhanced in value. While the human father is justly regarded as (under God) the *provider*, he looks to the mother to be a faithful *dispenser* of his gifts. Trusting to her loyalty, he knows that she will always dispense in accordance with his wishes, and when he finds his children extolling their mother's goodness, far from feeling thrust out from their affection, he rather rejoices, and says: "That is precisely as it should be. It is proof positive that my gifts are dispensed in accordance with my wishes. I am honoured and thanked in the honour paid to the one I have chosen as dispenser."

PART II

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

IN approaching the sublime truths facing us in this section we should recall to mind what our reading or observation has disclosed regarding the charms and graces of motherhood. The Old Testament presents to us the sterling qualities of the typical mothers of patriarchs and prophets, and Christian history offers, for our contemplation, many charming examples: Monica, Paula, Pica (mother of St Francis), Jane of Aza (mother of St Dominic), Elizabeth of Hungary, Theodora (mother of St Thomas Aquinas), Blanche (mother of St Louis, King). In modern days such women as the mothers of Popes Leo XIII and Pius X, and the mother of the notable Vaughan family, prove to us that time-honoured nobility of type has not yet vanished.

Our imagination may safely be allowed free flight in conjuring up all possible perfections in those admirable women—perfections which reacted on the outer shell and presented to the eye the most exquisite grace of form and beauty of countenance. And yet, be it ever remembered that all those heroines sinned, at least, in Adam, and that the shadow of the Fall was cast on them.

This is a necessary preparation for the vision set before us by the Church in her Dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Mother of God. As our readers know, it runs thus: "We define that the doctrine which declares that the most Blessed Virgin

Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted to her by almighty God, through the merits of Christ Jesus, Saviour of mankind, was preserved from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore must be held firmly and constantly by all faithful Christians" (*Bull of Pope Pius IX*, " *Ineffabilis Deus*," of December 8, 1854).

Here we have a picture that transcends all human standards of criticism. None of the methods with which we are familiar can enable us to comprehend the excellence of this masterpiece of divine power. Our standards have relationship to the fallen children of Eve—to those who, like ourselves, were conceived and born in sin. True, we are witnesses to the wonders effected by grace in the souls and even in the bodies of those who rise superior to their lower nature, but we have never been in touch with one who was *never* under the ban of original sin. We have possibly been impressed by evidence of great virtue in contemporaries, but we can well conceive how that impression would be turned into *awe* were we brought face to face with a creature who was *ever* and *entirely* sinless.

Such a creature is Mary.

Although, as we have said, we cannot hope to comprehend her dignity and worth on this side of eternity, yet, seeing that she is presented to us by Christ as our Mother, it behoves us, with all the reverence due to this sublime subject, to approach it as part of our quest. For we are seeking grounds for the fulfilment of the obligation laid on us by God to honour our mother. Mary, by Christ's last legacy, has been bequeathed to us as our spiritual Mother, but primarily she was his own Mother according to the flesh. Our first task, therefore, must be to study how Omnipotence prepared her for that sublime office.

We have reflected on the physical, social, and spiritual equipment of our own mothers, in view of the office they had to fill in co-operating with the creative God in bringing us into the world; but engaging as the study then appeared to us, now that Mary appears on the scene it dwindles almost into insignificance.

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The epochs of expectancy have passed. The time fixed for the appearance of the Promised One is approaching. The world is full of portents. Types and figures have been exhausted. The earth is in a state of tension. Hell trembles with the rumbling of some strange hidden force that will ultimately shatter its power. The vengeful words of God have not been forgotten: "I will put enmities between thee and the woman and thy seed and her seed, and she shall crush thy head whilst thou liest in wait for her heel" (Gen. iii 15).

"*Who* is this woman who is to crush my head? *What* will be the line of attack? *How* will the threatened conquest be effected?"

Surely we may, without exaggeration, imagine these to have been the oft-repeated queries put by Satan as the ages rolled on. His superb intelligence must have made him aware that now the time was pregnant with some stupendous event. In the beginning, a woman was first in the line of his attack. That woman fell, and, through her, all the race. Once more was he to be pitted against woman! But *this* time, as was predicted, all his efforts should be in vain. *Who* could she be? The notable women of the Old Law he knew. They had lived and died, and all of them had been under his ban. His seductions still prevailed. *Who* was still to come and to come as conqueror?

So far, it was God's close-guarded secret.

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Saints Joachim and Ann were, in the ordinary course of conjugal life, blessed with fruitfulness, but, as our Holy Mother the Church teaches, in the dogma already quoted, Mary their child was preserved from original sin.

God, living in an eternal NOW, beholds the Crucifixion of his divine Son, and applies its fruits to her who, some years later, is to bear the infinitely great Victim. She who is to be the Christ-Bearer, the Mother of him who is to vanquish Satan and hell, must not be handicapped in her warfare with the infernal enemy. Eve had been constituted in grace when approached by Satan. The New Eve was not to be less favoured. Eve, created to be the mother of the living, was not to be more favoured than the New Eve who was to be the Mother of God, the giver of life. The New Eve, who was to be first in the line of attack, was to be equipped in the very first instant of her being with all the wealth of grace needed for the office which, in the secret counsels of God, she was destined to fill. She was to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word. In soul and body she must be free from stain: altogether immune from the sway of Satan.

How easily stated is this sublime revealed truth! How convincing it is, in the light of the Almighty Power, the Uncreated Wisdom, the Ineffable Purity and the Infinite Justice of God, but ah, how difficult, nay, how impossible it is for poor mortals to grasp all that it involves! No matter how we try, we shall always fall short of doing it justice. But although we must be content to await the full revelation of its sublimity until we see the Mother of God face to face in heaven, we should not be worthy of our call to the one true faith if we loved not to dwell on it as deeply as we can. This was our view in dealing with that humbler theme—our mother according to the flesh.

Even then we could not hope to do justice to all that motherhood implied, either in its remote or proximate preparation, in itself, or in its consequences for ourselves and for the world; but we found that reverent (though inadequate) speculation prompted to greater honour and love than, perhaps, had formerly been paid.

God grant that it may be so in our humble study of Mary Immaculate, the Mother of God. Ample justice can never be done, yet our minds and hearts will be more attuned to praise than if we timidly shrank from the study, professing our unfitness. The full grasp of a subject may be beyond man's power, but inane indeed would be his life if he did not grapple with it with whatever power he has. Doing what in him lies, God will not refuse the needful grace. And Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, will surely not refuse her powerful aid.

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Mary, then, from the first moment of her being, was full of sanctifying grace. Not for a moment of time was she under the sway of the enemy of God. Conceived thus, born thus, growing up thus, continuing thus even until death, every successive moment in her life had its value in forming the most perfect type of sanctity that the world has ever seen, or shall see, in a mere creature. What her childhood and her girlhood must have been, we can gather partly from what we know of ourselves. *She* must have been different to a degree far beyond our limited comprehension; but, by a process of elimination we can, at least, have some idea of her unparalleled holiness.

Although we were baptised a few hours or days after birth, we know how our tainted nature has haunted us through life, with its infantile petulance and obstinacy, its boyish or girlish proneness to do the wrong

thing rather than the right, its youthful opposition to law and order, its more mature subjection to the flesh rather than to the spirit, its agelong disposition to seek self rather than God, and to rest content with the honours of the world and the gratification of the senses rather than to seek the goods that perish not and the bliss that will be the portion of the disembodied spirit.

In Mary there were no such relics of evil, inasmuch as original sin had never stained her soul. Her soul, therefore, was always mistress over the domain of the senses. Perfect harmony existed between it and the members of her body. Her reasoning powers ran on the lines of justice, her will was in conformity with the divine will, her senses were subject to the spirit, and her spirit was in close union with that of the creative God. Actual graces were hers, in abundant measure, and none of them were squandered.

Such wondrous harmony could not be inoperative, and hence we conclude that of all the fair women who have existed, or ever shall exist, Mary was the fairest. For, in all stages of human life, it is unruly passion which deforms the body, wrinkles the brow, and robs the countenance of its candour, rather than the strain of honest toil. Mary Immaculate, ever rising superior to passion, was all fair. If the Church, adown the ages, in its canonisation of the saints, has eulogised their heroic practice of virtue, it must be conceded that if such merit was found in men and women who had all, at least, sinned in Adam, she who had been conceived without original sin, and had been pre-eminently faithful to the wondrous graces heaped upon her, must have surpassed all other saints in the heroism and splendour of her virtues. So, not only was she the fairest of all the children of Eve, but she, the New Eve, through her privileges, graces, and merits, excelled

all the elect of God in heaven as well as on earth. How, then, can we forbear exclaiming with the Church: "Thou art all fair, O Mary, and the original stain is not in thee. Thy garment is white as snow, and thy face is as the sun. Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people. Blessed art thou, O Virgin Mary, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Draw us, O immaculate Virgin, we will run after thee, in the odour of thy ointments" (*First Vespers: Feast of the Immaculate Conception*).

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We are more than prepared, then, to give our assent to the words of the Archangel Gabriel: "Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women" (St Luke i 28). The words introduce, to the fallen and stricken world, the woman who is to crush the serpent's head. The demons hear and tremble! The woman against whom their attacks are to be flung stands revealed. In anticipating the conflict, they wondered what *her* line of attack or defence should be. Hearing it, they could not understand. It was to them an unknown quantity. Bowing down, Mary makes it manifest. It is *Humility*! "Who having heard" (the above salutation) "was troubled at his saying, and thought within herself what manner of salutation this should be" (St Luke i 29).

Among her race those women were most regarded as blessed who, in bearing children, nourished the hope of providing the world with the predicted Messiah. But Mary, in her lowliness of heart, aspired to no such honour. Virgin she was and Virgin she meant to remain, leaving the much-coveted honour of Motherhood of the Messiah to some other member of her sex, found worthy, in the eyes of God, to bring forth

the Promised One. But this very humility was the secret of the favour she had found in the counsels of the all-seeing God. "And the angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father: and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever. And of his kingdom there shall be no end" (St Luke i 30-33). Thus did Mary hear her initial fears voiced from heaven itself. She found that the suggested blessedness *was* associated with the honour so coveted by the matrons of her race—an honour from which her deeply-rooted humility had always made her recoil. Still wrestling with the angel, in the interests of the virtue of humility, so cherished by her, she advanced an argument which to her virginal mind seemed unanswerable. "And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?" She had looked nature full in the face with all the innocent candour of sanctity, seeing God's creative work with God-like eyes, and understanding divine sanctions with a God-like mind, but never yet had the experiences of her people provided her with the spectacle of a virgin bearing a child without detriment to her privilege. True, she was familiar with the text of Isaías (vii 14), "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," and, indeed, as she spoke, the memory thereof may have flitted across her mind, but nevertheless, true to her prerogative of humility, she pressed the objection: "How shall this be done?"

In the secret counsels of God the answer had long been prepared, and it came convincingly from the lips of the angel. "And the angel, answering, said to her:

The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And, therefore, the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God " (St Luke i 35).

As if to prove that he understood her objection had been urged, *not* in captious mood, nor through lack of faith in divine power, but in real humility of heart, the angel condescended to explain that the projected birth would be effected without the slightest blemish to Mary's virginal integrity. With this in view, he recounted a miracle which had been enacted six months before. " And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son *in her old age* : and this is the sixth month with her that is called barren. *Because no word shall be impossible with God* " (St Luke i 36, 37).

Swiftly through Mary's mind flashed the thought: " An old and barren woman can, *by God's power*, become fruitful ! Therefore I, a virgin, *by the self-same power*, can—even though fruitful—remain virginal ! " Equally instantaneous was her momentous decision: " And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word " (St Luke i 38).

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Then, indeed, was the New Era of Grace confirmed. It was inaugurated by the Immaculate Conception. It is now confirmed by the Incarnation, destined to be consummated by the Crucifixion, and then broadcasted by Pentecost.

The Incarnation ! Known to our Catholic forefathers as " Lady Day." They seemed to understand far more intimately and affectedly than we how Mary was in the first line of attack. The Incarnation ! Then, indeed, was war declared on Satan and his host: " I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed " (Gen. iii 15).

By the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, who overshadows Mary as he once overshadowed the hitherto fruitless earth, Mary conceives. The fruit of her womb is the result of her humble and docile co-operation with the Holy Spirit of God, who becomes her divine Spouse. She, in her perfect human nature, more beautiful by far than that of Eve before the Fall, provides all that is necessary for the production of an entity who will be really and truly human, and then and there the Word, the only begotten Son of the eternal Father, the Second *Person* of the Blessed Trinity, unites himself therewith in indissoluble unity. The divine nature is hypostatically united with the human in the *one divine Person* of God the Son. "*The Word was made Flesh.*" What that divine Person has taken up in that most sacred of all tabernacles—Mary's womb—he will never relinquish. Thence and for all eternity he will be known as Jesus, the God-Man, Son of Mary. He is the Seed of the Woman, the Woman divinely chosen to crush the serpent's head. She it is who supplies the precious Blood which will be shed for men. She it is who for nine months will shelter him in her womb. She it is who for the natural time will feed him at her breast. She it is by whose knee he will receive his first lessons. It is she who will prepare the outfit for his missionary journeyings, who will suggest his first miracle, who will be the subject of his last legacy to men, and who, until the end of time, will ever be the most potent means of leading all mankind to the feet of him whom she conceived and brought into the world.

O God, be thou for ever blessed and adored for having, in thy mercy and thy love, graced the blighted earth with this most precious gift—Mary, Mother of thy divine Son—in herself an exemplar of all the virtues and, in the fruit of her womb,

the hope of all whose hearts aspire to thee, the living God.

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In the preceding part we, at a reverent distance, tried to picture the mind of a woman made conscious of being blessed by God with power to conceive. At a still more reverent distance let us contemplate Mary at this supreme moment. Hitherto, her humility was deep indeed, now it is abysmal in its depth. For to the truly humble soul, the greater the height to which it is raised, the deeper the sense of its unworthiness.

The angelic words recur to her mind: "Hail, full of grace," "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee," "The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee," "The Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

May we not surmise that she mused thus? "*Full of grace!* Ah, now I seem to understand! God overshadowing me. God within me. The Son of God *my* Son: the long promised One, the One desired by my nation, the One destined to redeem a lost world—*mine!* O Father of Heaven, O mighty God, I am unworthy of such a favour—oh, make me worthy!"

We know how perfectly God had prepared the vessel for its divine contents, but Mary would doubtless be persistent in voicing the humble sentiments of her heart, as we have, with due reverence and awe, ventured to suggest.

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In pursuing our inquiry as to how honour should be paid the mother who bore us, we speculated on her day-dreams and found that many of them were necessarily vague, while few of those which seemed well founded could ever be realised.

Not so with Mary's musings.

Many of them were based on the definite statements

of the Archangel Gabriel, others grew out of those statements, and, presumably, the divine Person now within her womb would prompt yet more. He was the Word made Flesh. He was the very God. The Throne of David was to be his. He was to reign for ever. And, now that that divine Person was united to the human soul and body evolving in her womb, can we imagine that he would remain inactive and telegraph no message to the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, Mary, the Woman chosen to be his Mother ?

We, in the preceding section, reasoned that if, *by a miracle*, we could have communicated with our mothers in the womb to express our homage, we should have deemed it our bounden duty to do so. The infinitely great Miracle-worker was in Mary's womb ! Ineffable, therefore, must have been the communications between Mary's soul and the divine Person who, within her, was hypostatically united to the human nature with which she was providing him.

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In the history of sanctity we invariably find that humility without humiliations is non-existent. So Mary, peerless in her sanctity, was no sooner made aware of her dignity as the destined Mother of God than she was subjected to a test supremely calculated to prove the reality of her humility. That test was provided by St Joseph's doubt. Familiar as we are with the many proofs given of a capacity for thought-reading on the part of great saints, we cannot doubt that Mary saw what was passing in the mind of her saintly spouse. Nor can we conceive that the knowledge left her undisturbed. To be doubted by the chaste Joseph, and yet to feel that, in justice to God, she must be tongue-tied, must have made her agonise. For as God had not, so far, sanctioned the revelation of the mystery of the Incarnation, *she* could not betray

the divine reticence. But oh, what a humiliation ! In silence, in profound humility, she waited and she prayed.

Divine revelation tells us how the trying episode ended. " Now the generation of Christ was in this wise. When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child, of the Holy Ghost. Whereupon Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not wishing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold the angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins " (St Matt. i 18-21).

Who can venture to doubt that to St Joseph was now transferred the burden of humiliation, when Mary gathered from his countenance, if not from his words, that he stood aghast and humbled to the dust because of his temporary doubt ? Yet his humiliation was more than compensated by the knowledge of the dignity conferred on him—that, namely, of being the foster-father of the divine Child. The information imparted to him that that Child should " save his people from their sins " completed the chain of sublime subjects provided for Mary's contemplation. Her daily reflections were now solidly based on Christ's Divinity, Kingship, Everlasting Rule, and Redeeming Mission.

O Mary, thus enlightened by God, because of thy deep humility, deign to pray for us, that through perfect subjection to the divine will in all the humiliations of our state, we may merit to obtain the light that is needful for our progress in virtue, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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In the foregoing section we concluded that no intelligent mother could conceive without adding to her mental stature. How Mary's mind must have developed as she memorised the Messianic prophecies, pondered over her ancestral line, humbly dwelt on the hitherto enigmatical texts relating to herself—"Sealed Fountain," "Enclosed Garden"—and, in spirit, gazed fondly on him who was to be "the most beautiful of the children of men." Day by day her soul must have hungered for expression: sublime thoughts so crowded her mind.

Her errand of mercy to her cousin St Elizabeth gave her an opportunity to disburden her soul. He who, within her, had been fostering and approving her sublime thoughts used the visit as a medium for the transmission of a message to his precursor. "And Mary, rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda. And she entered into the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: and she cried out with a loud voice, and said: *Blessed art thou among women*, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord" (St Luke i 39-45).

Is it not natural to suppose that the divine Person who thus manifested himself to St John must, as we have already surmised, have communicated sweetness, light, solace, and fortitude to the soul of his Mother Mary? Dare we imagine him dealing less generously

with the Mother who was bearing him than with her cousin and his precursor, St John ?

What a sublime council-room we are admitted to ! Zachary's house is, doubtless, humble enough, yet a divine court is held therein. The Word of God Incarnate sanctifies and communicates with his precursor from the sacred tabernacle of Mary's womb—true Ark of the Covenant—Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Ghost, and he that is mighty (the eternal Father) surely looks down as his humble, docile handmaid intones ■ canticle which, resounding through the highest heavens, is destined to re-echo all over the earth to the end of time.

“ *Magnificat !* ”

The pent-up waters of Adoration, Thanksgiving, Wonderment, Humility, and Prophecy are let loose, and—limpid, sparkling, healing, and refreshing—they stream from Mary's lips to bedew the arid waste of human hearts and render them fruitful for evermore—fruitful in faith, hope, love, and gratitude.

O Mary, sweetest Mother, obtain for us a faith like unto thine own and the grace to acknowledge our indebtedness to him who is mighty, through the merits of thy Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

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So far as speech went, the *Magnificat* was, practically, Mary's “ *Nunc dimittis*,” for all subsequent elevations of her soul were reserved for God in the secrecy of her home and were no longer broadcasted to the bounds of the earth. Once her divine Son was born into the world she, like all the great mothers of all ages, was silent. She knew that he who was recognised by all as “ the Son of Mary ” would speak for both. What is speech but a development of the first few syllables lisped at a mother's knee ? What need is there for a mother's speech when her sons and daughters fill the

air with sound and renew the face of the world by their mighty deeds? Really great mothers of notable men and women are proverbially silent. Mary was the Mother of Christ, the God-Man—therefore the *greatest* of mothers and, as such, the most silent of women.

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The very heavens opened for the egress of the Archangel Gabriel on his mission to the ever-Blessed Virgin Mary at Nazareth, and they lifted up their gates with glad acclaim on his return, as he announced that the Word was made Flesh and now dwelt in the Virgin's womb.

The moment has at length come for the Word made Flesh to dwell amongst men, and lo, every door is closed! He longs to come amongst his own, but his own receive him not.

During St Joseph's anxious search for a fitting resting-place, Mary's trust remains unshaken. Her humility, once more exposed to a most searching test, is but deepened. The coldness, selfishness, human respect, disdain, and cruelty manifest on all sides disturb not her profound peace of soul. Only the truly humble are the truly heroic. If her divine Child is denied admission to a house built with human hands, there still remains some corner of the earth which is *his*. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. xxiii 1). And what canopy could be grander or more befitting a divine birth than the star-spangled vault, swung into space by his own creative hand?

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn" (St Luke ii 7).

Why are the Scriptural words so few and terse?

That all who are the brothers and sisters of Christ by adoption may spend their lives in constant contemplation of the divine Birth, which reconciles them to the eternal Father and gives unto them Mary as their mother. The sublimity of this truth dispenses with the need of many words. "For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son: that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren" (Rom. viii 29).

From the moment that Mary brought forth her divine Child we also became her children, destined as we were, in the mind of God, to be adopted into sonship with his own divine self. In view of this edict of almighty God, any attempt at special pleading for due honour to Mary, the Mother of his divine Son, would be unpardonably insolent. For she is, in the existing economy of grace, the divinely chosen medium through which it became possible for us to be adopted as children of God and made joint heirs with Christ. The truth has only to be stated in order to win from all hearts such tender devotion to Mary as will please the eternal Father who, in his infinite mercy, gave her to the world as the Mother of his divine Son and as our mother. "*Honour thy mother.*"

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Mary, as we have seen, even before the birth of her divine Son, was witness to his mission of sanctification of St John the Baptist, yet in his mother's womb. Now that he is born she is confronted with another episode, which forecasts the opening words of his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land" (St Matt. v 3, 4).

"And there were in the same country shepherds watching, and keeping the night watches over their flock. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by

them, and the brightness of God shone round about them, and they feared with a great fear. And the angel said to them: Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you. You shall find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger " (St Luke ii 8-12). Coming with haste, " they found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger " (St Luke ii 16). Poor, meek, and humble, the shepherds became the first earthly missionaries of the good tidings. " And all that heard wondered: and at those things that were told them by the shepherds " (St Luke ii 18).

We need not wonder that " Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart " (St Luke ii 19), for they linked up with the deep musings which had obsessed her mind during the preceding months. We have, more than once, dwelt on the inner thoughts of the average mother regarding the future of her child. They are necessarily vague. As we ascend in the social scale, the higher we mount the more definite become the mother's anticipations. The mother of a prince of the blood has precise ideas regarding her child's future—but, nevertheless, that future is subject to contingencies over which neither mother nor child has control. Mary's musings, in this respect, were absolutely definite. They were founded on the veracity of God. She knew that her Child was the very God Incarnate; his mission had been unfolded to her by the Archangel, and her knowledge of the prophecies acquainted her with his titles: " For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace.

His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace. He shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom: to establish it, and strengthen it with justice, from henceforth and for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this " (Isa. ix 6, 7).

Familiar as we are with the depth of mind shown by women—sometimes *very young women*—when illumined by grace (witness the recently beatified Teresa of the Child Jesus), we should be guilty almost of sacrilege if we hesitated to credit Mary with incomparably deeper insight. Our previous reflections suggested that she must have been filled with ever-increasing wonderment at the mighty things enacted through her agency, and that she would naturally look for link after link in the chain of evidence that would support the prophecies with which, from childhood, she was familiar. To think of Mary as a simpering maiden who, in nonchalant fashion, received God's gifts without any exercise of her *mind* is not only to do her an injustice but also to insult the wisdom of God. Mary was the first great Woman-Contemplative of the New Law. " But Mary kept all these words, *pondering* them in her heart " (St Luke ii 19).

Now that her divine Son is born, the shepherds tell her of his mission to the world as the Prince of Peace: " And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest: and on earth peace to men of good will " (St Luke ii 13, 14). The homage paid by those men of peace, those poor, ignorant, meek, silent, and prayerful men, testifies that her divine Son's work has, indeed, begun. The representatives of the poor, of those who will ever form the greater part of his kingdom, have left their flocks in haste and reverently paid court to him as he rests enthroned—on a bed of straw ! In presence of him who was predicted

“Wonderful” they wonder (in the words of Scripture) and return “glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (St Luke ii 20).

If they—poor untutored men—were gifted with such power of praise, what of the ecstatic praise and glory paid by Mary to the mighty God resting on her bosom? Riveting her gaze upon his infant brow, she remembered what had been predicted of his beauty and exulted in its realisation. Pondering over his titles, oh, how deeply she meditated on her responsibilities as Mother! “Wonderful, Counsellor, God, Prince of Peace, Ruler, Saviour.” How much would the divine Father do? How far would the Holy Spirit enlighten? How much would he, her Son, contribute? How much would be expected from *her* towards the completion of the mighty task?

The God-Child, as he reposed on her bosom, was himself the answer to her maternal questionings. His very presence there, in that humble posture, was more than sufficient answer. Translated into words it ran: “Thou art my Mother! Behold me at thy breast. I am thy Son—to become a docile pupil at thy knee. For so it behoves me to fulfil all justice. My eternal Father has said: ‘*Honour thy mother.*’ I am here to obey his command. He and the Paraclete will not be less faithful to their pact.”

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Christ’s public works of justice began with his Circumcision at the prescribed time, and Mary once more found prediction verified: “And after eight days were accomplished that the child should be circumcised, his name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb” (St Luke ii 21). Present at the first shedding of his Blood, Mary was likewise destined to be present when

the last drop oozed out of his Sacred Heart for the redemption of man. Did the new title of "Saviour" suggest to her that by some sanguinary tragedy the liberation of man would be achieved? This, doubtless, was one of the many speculations which filled the mind of that peerless Mother with wonderment—a wonderment which was to increase at every successive stage of her divine Child's life.

Mary vied with her God-Child in the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law. In the sight of the eternal Father neither of them was bound by it, inasmuch as the generation of Jesus was miraculously outside the laws of nature, but—because of their humility—both submitted. In the spirit of prompt and blind obedience, Mary presents herself for legal purification only to find herself blessed by God with further light on the mission of her divine Child, and with more food for reflection on the part she herself was appointed to take in the scheme of redemption. The Holy Ghost, her Spouse, sends one of his elect, the aged Simeon, to give public testimony to the coming of the desired of nations. Filled with the Holy Ghost, he takes into his aged arms this wonderful "First-Born Child"—now offered according to the Mosaic Law and called holy to the Lord—and bursts forth into the sublime "*Nunc Dimittis*," which, to this day, forms part of the official prayer of the Church: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace. Because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: a light to the revelation of the gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel" (St Luke ii 29-32).

We are told that Mary and Joseph "were wondering at those things which were spoken concerning him" (St Luke ii 33). We need not marvel at this, for, as we have said, new light was now given them. A

further step was taken in the promulgation of Christ's mission; for the knowledge of his coming—no longer confined to the simple shepherds—was revealed from heaven to an official of the temple, and the *gentiles* were mentioned as participants in the glory that was to come. This, indeed, was matter more than sufficient to fill with wonderment those who were naturally conservative with regard to the privileges of Israel.

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Mary and the foster-father were blessed by the saintly seer, but to Mary alone did he exclaim: "Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed" (St Luke ii 34, 35). Anna the prophetess, coming in at the same hour, confesses to the Lord, and speaks of him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel. Simeon's prophecy possibly reminded the hearers of one which had been uttered long before: "And he shall be a sanctification to you. But for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to the two houses of Israel, for a snare and a ruin to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And very many of them shall stumble and fall, and shall be broken in pieces, and shall be snared and taken" (Isa. viii 14, 15).

What a sombre vista now spreads out before Mary's wondering mind! Her divine Son will occasion contention—fierce contention—in which some will rise and others fall. He, the Prince of Peace, will be contradicted. And she, it was predicted, is to be identified with him in all—otherwise how could *her* soul be pierced with a sword? So, although he is God, and Wonderful, Mighty, Ruler, and Prince of Peace; being *Saviour* as well, his future will mean the rending of the heart! "What mattereth it for *me*," she

doubtless thought, "provided *he*, my Son and my God, will reign in the hearts of men? Let my soul, O heavenly Father, be pierced with whatever sword awaits it, for like the mother of the Machabees I offer the fruit of my womb to thee, the divine giver."

Christ, the Child-God, from that moment lived under the shadow of a cross, and in that shadow stood his Mother, in spirit; Mary his Mother lived under the shadow of a sword. Once again the woman was first in the line of attack. How undauntedly she faced it! Christ's Crucifixion and Mary's dolours were foreshadowed. In all the contentions which will surge around Jesus, the Mother will be involved. She could not be ignorant of the vivid description found in *Isaias*: "And he shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and as a root out of a thirsty ground. There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him: despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. . . . The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was his own will, and he opened not his mouth: and he shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth. . . . And the Lord was pleased to bruise him in infirmity. . . . Therefore will I distribute to him very many, and he shall divide the spoils of the strong, because he hath delivered his soul unto death, and was reputed with the

wicked; and he hath borne the sins of many, and hath prayed for the transgressors " (Isa. liii, *passim*).

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God, who in his mercy conceals from ordinary mothers the trials that will beset the lives of their children, lest their hearts should fail them, acts otherwise with Mary, the Mother of his divine Son, for he has blessed her with a fortitude proportionate to the intense pain her soul has to bear. The Mother of the divine Martyr must have the martyr spirit. God, who spares not his own Son, does not spare the Mother. Nor would the more than heroic Mother wish to be spared. Simeon's prophecy bears fruit in her soul—the fruit of contemplation—and the prophecy of Isaia provides subject-matter in abundance. She now becomes the Woman of Sorrows. No sooner is she regaled by the contemplation of the beauty of her divine Child than, in spirit, she sees him bruised, woe-begone, unsightly, despised and rejected, stricken and slain. When he lisps his first syllables at her knee, she remembers that that voice is to be hushed and that the Child of her heart is to be dumb.

" And the child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom, and the grace of God was in him " (St Luke ii 40). But in bearing witness to his sinless life, Mary recalls to mind that the iniquities of the world are to be laid on him, and her soul is filled with sorrow.

Oh, sinners that we are, what are *our* thoughts—those thoughts spoken of by holy Simeon? Should not we be found full of compassion for that holy Mother, full of awe in contemplating the trust reposed in her by God in thus revealing, long before the time, the martyrdom of blood her divine Son was to suffer and the martyrdom of sorrow she herself was to endure? In answer to her piteous wonderment as to who could so cruelly treat her Son we have, alas!

to confess our guilt. O Jesus, Son of Mary, in thy mercy, forgive us for our complicity in thy death. O Mary, Mother of God, pardon us for causing thy sorrows.

Let us, in a like spirit, compassionate and pray for those whose thoughts are alien to Scriptural revelation. That revelation literally forces Mary into the foreground and surrounds her with a halo before which all true believers in Christ's divinity stand in awe. While the living God thus presents the Mother of his Son for their study, veneration, and imitation, some in all ages have made of her a sign to be contradicted, and have, in piercing her soul, merited the indignation of the God who so honoured her. For how could a just and all-wise God find pleasure in the cant which pretends that, in honouring Mary, *he* would be forgotten; that, in dragging her statue from its honoured niche, *he* would be pleased; or that in paying her halting, timid, apologetic honour, *he* would loom up more largely in the believing mind? All history proves that where scant honour has been paid to Mary, belief in the mystery of the Incarnation has been dwarfed almost to vanishing point, and true respect for womankind has perished. On the other hand, wherever Mary's place in the divine economy of redemption has been reverently studied and she herself has been duly honoured, the majesty of God has stood out in infinitely high relief, and woman has been raised to the pedestal for which Mary's exaltation was meant to prepare her.

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The Child nestling on Mary's breast seemed as helpless as other little ones, yet he was already broadcasting a message which, manifested in a blaze of light, arrested the attention of the powerful and the learned and brought them meekly to his feet. What mattered the intervening leagues, with all their hidden

dangers ? The Magi knew the hour of their visitation, and while men around Jesus' humble home were sharpening their swords for the slaughter of the newly-born Child, they—led by a star—were well on their way to adore him. How the Mother of that divine Child must have wondered to find this visit follow so closely on the preceding one. Poverty, humility, and simplicity had already paid court to the infant God; the temple, through Simeon, had set its seal on his mission; and now gentile light, learning, culture, and power were present to offer gifts. As Mary gazed on the gold, frankincense, and myrrh, she was more and more convinced of the magnitude of the task confided to her. For she (in the light of previous revelations) realised the significance of the offerings. Her Son was God, King, Priest, Victim ! And *her* rôle was that of *Mother* !—Mother of God, Mother of the great High Priest, Mother of the divine Victim destined to be offered for the sins of men; yea, more: Mother whose own soul should be pierced with a sword. Oh, how early in the life of her Son had the blow fallen on her ! She could speculate but vaguely as to when *his* dereliction would be accomplished, but the knowledge of her own desolation was already at hand.

Hark !

“ And after they [the Magi] were departed, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and fly into Egypt; and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the child to destroy him. Who arose and took the child and his mother, by night, and retired into Egypt; and he was there until the death of Herod. That it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying: Out of Egypt have I called my Son ” (St Matt. ii 13-15).

During that anxious journey of over forty leagues,

oh, how deeply the sword of anguish pierced Mary's soul ! Already was her divine Child set up for the fall and resurrection of many in Israel. She had witnessed the spiritual exaltation of the shepherds, the elevating call of the gentiles, and now, in spirit, she contemplated the prostration of many mothers, in and around Bethlehem, who bewailed the butchery of their infant sons. True, the massacre meant the gathering of flowers ripe for heaven—a glorious resurrection for the little pioneer martyrs of the New Covenant—but, oh, worse than martyrdom would be the lifelong grief of defrauded mothers, each of whom cherished the hope that, perhaps, *her* child would be the saviour of his people. Later on, Mary learned the terrible end, the *fall*, of the cruel tyrant from whose clutches she and the faithful Joseph had rescued the divine Child.

League after league of painful travel deepened the home-sick feeling, for every mile carried them farther from spots that had become hallowed. True, even in Egypt they should find compatriots who had fled from the tyranny of Herod ; but no resting-place could compensate for the loss of the holier ones left behind. Their only consolation was that the Lord of the temple was with them, and that, with him in the midst, no resting-place could be really sordid.

Egypt was directly under Roman domination and, therefore, quite beyond Herod's jurisdiction ; yet Mary, although fortified with the divine protection (implied in the command to migrate thither), must have been keenly apprehensive of danger. It was doubtless part of the sorrow she had to bear during the temporary stay among aliens. How hard their lot ! How precarious their means of livelihood ! Still their personal hardships drew no complaint from Mary's lips. The new Rachel was too intent in commiserating the woes of her sisters to think of her own. " A voice was heard

on high of lamentation, of mourning and weeping, of Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted for them, because they are not " (Jer. xxxi 15). But even in the throes of mourning, hope was nowise lost, for had not the prophet continued (v. 16), " Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thy eyes from tears: for there is a reward for thy work . . . and they shall return out of the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy last end . . . and the children shall return to their own borders."

Nevertheless, the solicitude of Mary and her spouse for the well-being of the divine Child continued to shadow all their days and nights with fear, as we gather from the sacred text: " But when Herod was dead, behold an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: Arise, and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel. For they are dead that sought the life of the child. Who arose and took the child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, *he was afraid to go thither*: and being warned in sleep retired into the quarters of Galilee " (St. Matt. ii 19-22).

Thus, Joseph's fear—a fear shared by Mary—was well-founded, and, being so, was appreciated by heaven. Galilee, therefore, was divinely suggested as a final resting-place. There Herod Antipas, the more humane brother of Archelaus, reigned. " And coming he dwelt in a city called Nazareth " (St. Matt. ii 23).

In preparing to settle down to a life which for many years should be hidden, the unexampled experiences of the few preceding years provided Mary with abundant matter for deep and absorbing contemplation. Who can fathom the depths of her musings as she traversed the last few leagues that lay between exile and the home wherein she hoped to perfect her vocation

as the Mother of God? Deep indeed was her sense of responsibility, ever-increasing her dread of impending dangers, and fathomless her solicitude to prove worthy of her sublime mission.

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Her task has scarce begun ere Mary's soul is once more pierced with the sword.

Like the mothers contemplated in the preceding section, Mary could not but be preoccupied with her Child's future. However, unlike others, she knew the leading lines on which that wondrous life would run. She foresaw that *some* day her divine Child would cease to speak in terms of home, and that his eternal Father's business would become so present to his mind as to drive her, temporarily, into the background. Thus had she seen it happen to other mothers—mothers of children whose works were of ordinary importance—so, in view of the superhuman task that awaited her Child, the God-Man, could *she* hope to prove an exception? Echo answered *no*. Therefore, far from kicking against the goad, she accepted the inevitable and devoted all her time and exercised all her infused and experimental gifts in fitting out her Child for his mission, and in fortifying her heart for the anticipated separation.

What a heavenly task was hers!

To know that Jesus was verily the Son of the Most High God and yet to find him a docile, tractable Child, susceptible to all the impressions that she, fondest of mothers, strove to make. This, indeed, was ravishing.

All are aware how mothers treasure up to the end of long lives the sayings and doings of their little ones, but never in the history of the human race could there be a richer repertoire than Mary's. "And the child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of God was in him" (St Luke ii 40). How profound,

then, his queries; how ready his answers; how apt and perfect his every act!

And yet over the fond Mother hung the shadow of the sword. She could not imagine that the shadows which hung over her Son would close in until he should be mature—for had he not just been snatched from impending danger? But the experimental knowledge she had gained through the flight into Egypt warned her that she must be ever prepared for the unexpected.

The unexpected happened in the midst of joy. The sword fell after a spell of radiant happiness.

What happy hours were those spent in the temple of the living God, wherein she and her spouse, with the divine Child in their company, worshipped the Most High! The time came to return. There was much bustle and noise, harnessing of beasts, storing of provisions, interchange of courtesies among old friends, and so, as in all similar gatherings, clever children were supposed to look after themselves. And everyone knows what a wondrous freemasonry exists between little ones. While their elders stand on ceremony, innocent play unites all children in universal brotherhood. If, then, at any given moment, Mary found not her Child by her side, the natural inference was that he was either with his foster-father or in the company of some of his juvenile acquaintances. All would be well at the close of the day's journey homeward, for then he would be found close to his Mother, as had happened on the outward trek.

Alas! the Mother's expectations were not realised.

Picture the anxious search, first of all amongst the nearest of kin, then among strangers, the raising of a hue and cry in the neighbourhood of the resting-place, and, all the while, a tumult of emotion in Mary's heart. Lost! Saved from Herod's wiles only to be lost! Yet, what more could she or Joseph have done than had

been done? He was so wise, so docile. Oh, he would not, could not abscond of his own free will. Had beasts devoured, had brigands borne him off with a view to ransom, or had enemies kidnapped him, in pursuance of the former decree of Herod?

Imagine three days spent in the meshes of these alarming fears! In doing so, picture the fortitude of the Mother who bore all without any abatement of her faith and hope in God.

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“And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his wisdom and his answers. And seeing him they wondered. And his mother said to him: Son, why hast thou done so to us? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said to them: How is it that you sought me? *did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?* And they understood not the word that he spoke to them” (St Luke ii 46-50).

What startlingly new light for Mary!

Hitherto her divine Son had sat at her knee as they talked of eternal truths and of the heroes and heroines of their race, and luminous as had been his speech and profound his questions, he had not assumed the air of a teacher. But here, amidst the doctors, she could read, from their rapt attention, that the listeners deemed themselves scholars rather than teachers. *The* teacher seemed to be her divine Child. Has his mission, then, begun? Hitherto he has spoken and acted only as a wise child, and always in terms of *Home*—but here he is in his heavenly Father’s temple, nay, his own temple. Is he lost to her for evermore? Is he now speaking and acting in terms of his *mission*—on his “*Father’s business*”? Has the

anticipated time of separation arrived so early in his life ?

But all these drifting thoughts are swamped by the motherly instinct : that instinct which leads the stricken mother, when robbed of her child by death, to cry : " O God ! *why*, oh, *why* hast thou done this ?" In that heartbroken cry there is no lack of faith in God's providential care ; but the distraught creature must needs voice the instinct which the Creator himself has given. " Can a mother forget her child ?" Even so, Mary cries : " Son, why hast thou done so to us ?" She knows that whatever he does is best, but she cannot divest herself of her deeply-rooted motherly instinct. The cry, in a manner, forecasts Christ's own exclamation in the hour of his desolation : " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" (St Matt. xxvii 46).

The answer given by Jesus confirms the Mother's conjectures. He is bent on his Father's business. But *how* ? His presence there threw *some* light on the problem, but there was still much room for wonderment regarding the issue, therefore " they understood not the word that was spoken to them."

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Adown the ages the enemies of Mary have fastened on this episode to belittle her and to dilate on what they style " Christ's rebuke." Let us, lovers of the Mother of God, rather thank her for having been the means of bringing the divinity of her Child, and his mission to men, into high relief. Let us, adorers of God, thank him for the signal favour done Mary by thus illuminating her mind with regard to her future course as Mother and Instructress of his divine Son. She now saw, more clearly than before, what that course must be. Henceforth, without presumption, she could confer with him on the work that lay before him. Hitherto she had, perforce, been more or less

tongue-tied. Now, and for ever after, she must be prepared to find him thinking and acting more in terms of his divine mission than of home and kindred.

The so-called "rebuke" to Mary vanishes into thin air in the light of the real rebuke it conveys to all who put worldly or domestic interests before those of God. Christ, even as a child, seized the opportunity given by his Mother's query to propound a theme which he stated, later on, in emphatic terms: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (St Matt. x 37). "Seek ye therefore *first* the kingdom of God and his justice" (St Matt. vi 33).

Christ's rebuke, in so far as it savours of rebuke, is levelled, not at the Mother who bore him, and who sought him *only* in the interests of the eternal Father, but rather at those who, even from childhood, put human interests in the first place, and disregard the wishes of him who drew them out of original nothingness. Let those stand rebuked who strive to keep children from their eternal Father by denying them religious education; who interfere with and prevent priestly or religious vocations; who contract marriage without compliance with God's laws; who amass wealth without recognising their responsibilities as stewards of God; who seek only the pleasures of the flesh and starve the soul.

To Mary, as we have seen, the supposed rebuke was a blessing in disguise. It prepared her remotely for the day which should surely come, when her divine Son would speak and act in terms of his eternal Father, and when she, buried in prayer and contemplation at home, would seem to be forgotten. Not that she could ever really be so, for, as we shall see, the memory of his Mother was entwined with many of his public works and must have been constantly enshrined in his loving Sacred Heart.

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No sooner did Mary hear mention made of the eternal Father's name than she—most docile of all his creatures—readily granted that all must be subordinated to his divine wishes. She, the Mother of God, would not be less reasonable than the mothers of men, for even they, as we have seen, bow to the inevitable when a son goes forth on his earthly father's business; and, loyally and unselfishly, do what in them lies to further the father's aims. Less could not be done by her who was the spouse of the Holy Ghost.

Nevertheless, her soul was relieved when Jesus, putting his hand into her own, "went down with them, and came to Nazareth, *and was subject to them*" (St Luke ii 51). After all, the awful yoke was not yet to be put on his childish shoulders!

Most gladly would she have ceded him, even then, but the eternal Father did not exact the sacrifice. Mary's meekness found favour with the Most High as did Abraham's, ages before. Her solicitude for the welfare of her divine Son merited for her the exclusive care of him for eighteen years. God saw that her solicitude was rooted in the knowledge of his high destiny and was void of all selfishness. Her sorrows, during the forced flight to Egypt, had made her fearful of the machinations of hidden enemies and had wrung from her the piteous inquiry which, as we have seen, was nevertheless rich in blessings.

If no other privilege than that which we are now dwelling upon had been bestowed on our Blessed Lady, it would merit for her all the honour that could possibly be paid. It is too startling to be lightly passed over. The more we linger over it the more we are impressed by the sublimity of her task, which was nothing less than to train her divine Son for his future mission. That mission began only when the state of subjection to Mary ended. He who had come

to fulfil all justice was, naturally, ever mindful of the divine precept, "*Honour thy mother*," and she, who had given to him his human nature, was not less heedful of the duties of her state as Mother. Those duties affected the soul and body of her divine Child and demanded from her instruction and good example. We must not regard Mary as a wax-figure in her own home, but as one who, from the very nature of her past privileges, stood immeasurably higher than the many notable Jewish mothers who had preceded her. In the case of others, maternal care ceased very early in their children's lives, but Mary's care of the divine Child endured until he was thirty years old. Until then he was "*subject*."

Never shall we rightly understand Mary's gifts of grace and nature unless we ponder deeply and constantly over the events of this protracted spell of tutelage. Nor, short of this, shall we be able to pay her the honour which, in God's designs, is her due. Again, short of such devout contemplation, those living under authority will be deprived of the fruits of the admirable lessons preached by the subjection of Jesus during his prolonged stay under his Mother's roof. To think of it! that from the age of twelve until the age of thirty, Christ was *subject* to Mary!

O Jesus, Son of Mary, and most admirable example of obedience, grant unto us a docility like to thine own, under all the conditions of servitude pertaining to our state of life.

O Mary, Mother of Jesus, remember that we, too, are thy children. Teach us how to love thy divine Son more and more, and deign to accept our promises of obedience to thy counsels, confident as we are that all of them will tend to the greater glory of our eternal Father who, in his tender mercy, gave thee to us as our Mother.

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Correction—one of the duties of a mother—was naturally ruled out, inasmuch as the Word made Flesh was entirely sinless. “And in him there is no sin” (1 St John iii 5). But the state of subjection imposed by the eternal Father, and freely accepted by Jesus, suggests the reception of instruction from those to whom, as a child, he owed obedience—primarily to the Mother who bore him and secondarily to St Joseph, on whom was laid the task of fostering him.

Christ’s soul, from the beginning, enjoyed the beatific vision; it was endowed with infused knowledge, but *experimental* knowledge was acquired in the course of time. Although, by virtue of the beatific vision and infused knowledge, he knew everything that experience could teach him, still he was—after a fashion—able to learn: to become acquainted with what he already knew, as from a different angle—viz., that of human *experience*. This acquired knowledge of Jesus added new force to what he already knew from other and higher sources. A genius in architecture knows absolutely all that can be known about a given edifice, but if he undertakes manual labour, in the work of construction, the experimental knowledge thus acquired will enforce the technical truths already known. Thus, after a merely human way, Jesus gradually came to know some of the things which he had known from the beginning by his divine and infused knowledge. “And whereas indeed he was the Son of God, he *learned* obedience by the things which he suffered” (Heb. v 8). His knowledge was always the most perfect that could be, but *experimentally* he disclosed it in a manner befitting his advancing years.

On Mary devolved the task of training the divine Youth according to the high standard which had been unfolded to her. For it goes without saying that the

bestowal of her privileges, and the heavenly revelations already recorded, suggested to her a certain standard to be aimed at in the training of the Saviour of his people. That standard should not be lower than those set up for, or by, the mothers of the prophets who had gone before. The methods of the Mother of the Great Reality must be immeasurably superior to those of the mothers of mere types and figures. Yet they must be confined to the two well-known channels: instruction and example.

No wonder, then, that the Church, in the course of ages, has given to Mary the titles so well merited by her: "Seat of Wisdom," "Mother of Good Counsel," "Mother of Good Study," picturing, in doing so, the Son of God, humbly, obediently, and reverently sitting at her knee as she expounded Scripture and held up to his juvenile mind high and sublime ideals—ideals with which he was already familiar, but which he loved to hear repeated by the lips of the Mother, of all other creatures the most perfectly equipped to expound them.

We can imagine with what sweetness and lucidity Mary pictured to her divine Son the youthful Samuel, the intrepid boy David, the youths in the fiery furnace, the young Isaac; and how she must have waxed eloquent as she described the fortunes of her race under the sway of the great leaders of old. Never had the seed of motherly instruction fallen on more fertile soil. Never did the world witness fruits like unto those which were largely the product of the prolonged intercourse between Mother and Child. So long as we keep in mind Christ's divine and infused knowledge, we cannot possibly overrate Mary's influence in the development of his experimental knowledge; for it was under her roof, and under that of St Joseph's workshop, that was developed the appealing human touch

discernible in Christ's public discourses. During that wonderful stay of eighteen years each day was marked by some episode which, later on, entered into parable, sermon, or desultory speech. Day by day Jesus was in touch with humanity under all its aspects. No phase of domesticity was unknown to him.

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Readers who are familiar with the home-life of the poor need not be told how the home of an avowedly charitable woman becomes a veritable place of pilgrimage, whereto flock all who are afflicted in mind or body. Mary's must have been such a home. So, years before Christ began to minister in public to the afflicted, he, experimentally, was witness to the needs of many who were mentally or corporally stricken; for had he not found them often at his Mother's door? Under her roof the weary benighted traveller had found rest; the starving beggar had broken bread; orphaned little children, timidly looking up for a smile, were never denied their wish; and he had often heard her wise and comforting words to those who were distressed in mind.

These and kindred works of charity, strange as they may seem to denizens of cold, heartless modern cities, are even now, as they were in the time of Christ, the almost daily experiences of simple pastoral peoples. This being taken for granted, who will dare deny that the home of the Mother of God was, in *this*, as in all other respects, perfect?

Christ's time (for the manifestation of his power) had not yet come, but we cannot conceive that, when it so pleased him, the hidden "virtue" which later on was so operative was, during those eighteen years, absolutely withheld from Mary. Possibly there were cases in which—all unknown to the sickly visitors to his Mother's home—"virtue went out from him."

Even we, occasionally, attribute more healing power to the sympathy of a visiting friend than to the nostrums of medical advisers. So we may safely reason that Mary, during the prolonged stay of her divine Son, repeatedly begged him to say a word of comfort to the needy ones who called at her door. True to the charitable instincts of her race, she could not do less, and her Son—once asked in the name of his eternal Father—could not refuse.

The value of Christ's sojourn under his Mother's roof is proved by every illustration which fell from his divine lips, once his public mission began. No high-browed terminology baffled the understanding of his hearers. Not only did he speak as one having *power*, but as one having *experimental knowledge* of the ways of the people. He, experimentally, amassed that knowledge in St Joseph's workshop, and in Mary's home and its neighbourhood. His discourses disclose intimate experimental knowledge of domestic customs, household utensils, workmen's tools, rural occupations, and social feasts. They deal with birth, life, marriage, and death; with joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, sickness and health. They condescend to the minutest items that enter into the everyday life and work of men: weights and measures, motes and beams, talents and groats, shepherds and sheep. They enlarge on the body and its raiment, the soul and its destiny, the heaven in which his Father dwells and the earth which is his footstool. All were the subject-matter of eighteen years' observation and contemplation and, presumably, of conversation while subject to Mary, his Mother.

Thus during the period of his hidden life Christ was, all the while, engaged in his heavenly Father's business, banking up experiences year by year which (since he appeared in public) were to be turned to the (piritual interest of men to the end of time.

No day was idly spent, no festival came without devout recognition, no joyous season recurred without Christ's sympathetic approval, no Sabbath dawned without the union of the Holy Family in prayer, rest, and adoration.

As the years passed by, Mary's virtues and influence must have been more and more apparent to all who had eyes to see the spiritual in woman. For what a life was hers! To care for Christ's most intimate wants, to guard jealously his hours of needful rest after arduous toil in the workshop; to respect his silences; to contemplate him when engaged in prayer; to accompany him to the synagogue and, at stated times, to the temple; to be enraptured witness to the developments in his character which, as time passed, he deigned to disclose; to command him as her Son and yet to adore him as her God—all those were her unique privileges for eighteen years.

Reader, what can we do but feel awed, too overawed for words, in presence of such a picture? Bowing our heads, let us confess that hitherto we have been sadly remiss in our study of the wonderful life of Mary, Mother of God, and that, consequently, our devotion to her has been cold. Henceforth, let us make amends by giving her what is her due—viz., heartfelt gratitude for her motherly solicitude for Jesus, our Saviour and our God, and—what will please her more—let us make an efficacious resolution to imitate her divine Son by our docility to all the ordinances which make for holiness of life.

Reflecting on Christ's hidden life, we cannot but see that when, later on, he was far afield from the old home the image of his Mother was never absent from his mind's eye. Was not that memory the secret of his tenderness to all who were of Mary's sex—a tenderness manifested for women in general, but more especially

for women who, alas, were frail? In all ages, even amongst mere men, the influence of good women has invariably led to the elevation of ideals. We have only to think of the stimulus given to St Jerome by Saints Paula and Eustochium; to St Augustine by St Monica; to St Francis of Assisi by St Clare; to St Francis de Sales by St Jane Frances de Chantal; and, if we chose to draw from secular sources, we should find our pages crowded out by luminous examples. In association, then, with Christ's experimental experiences, his long stay with his Mother—that woman so privileged and gifted above all others—must have benefited by her benign influence. His speech and his methods, free from academic aloofness, savoured of companionship with his holy Mother; hence all her sex could not but apprehend that he spoke and acted, unlike all other teachers, with perfect and sympathetic understanding of their womanly mentality.

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Christ's life at Nazareth at length merged into public life abroad. The transition came in the course of one of those expeditions, in the interests of social life, which were not foreign to the members of the Holy Family, for, as we have seen, they were ever identified with the people. The function happened to be a marriage in the neighbouring town of Cana. It proved to be unique, inasmuch as it gave Mary an opportunity of introducing her divine Son to the world, through the working of his first miracle.

During the home-life at Nazareth she had often conferred with him regarding the wants of their neighbours, and had ever been made aware of his tender sympathy with all who were distressed, so, as was natural, she, on this occasion, drew his attention to the fact that the festivities were in danger of falling

flat because of the lack of wine, the ordinary beverage on such occasions.

Jesus, mindful of the fact that they were no longer in their own home, but there only as invited guests, judged that interference with domestic arrangements would be ill-timed and, therefore, answered: "What is it to thee and to me? My hour is not yet come" (St John ii 4).

His answer clearly shows that he had read into his Mother's remark a suggestion that he could, *if he wished*, come miraculously to the aid of the impoverished or neglectful hosts.

Mary's motherly intuition, student as she had been of her divine Son's ways for eighteen years, told her that if his time had not yet come it was, nevertheless, imminent, for, turning to the waiters, she quietly said: "Whatever he shall say to you, do ye" (St John ii 5). Ever since, the world has been full of admiration at the result. *At Mary's instigation Christ performed his first miracle.* God alone knows the miracles of grace performed in all lands and in all classes of society, in the course of ages, at the instigation of the same holy Mother—all in the interests of his divine majesty and in the best interests of the human race. In every epoch of Christian history Mary has been saying to the human soul, "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye," solicitous as she has ever been for the refreshment of the souls of men with divine love. If we, through her intercession, and at the bidding of Christ, fill our souls with the water of heavenly desires, he, the all-powerful miracle-worker, will change those desires into the wine of love, and, in spirit, we shall be conscious that Mary is at hand, smiling approval at the docility which has merited for us the benefits her Son alone can give.

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Now that Christ is fairly launched on his public mission, Mary naturally retires into the background. He will now preach and teach in terms of his eternal Father, but, as we have already said, the influence of his Mother will be traceable in all that he says and does. In his first sermon, she will be present to his mind, and in his last agonising speech she will be mentioned.

Who can read the Beatitudes without feeling that Mary was in the foreground in Christ's mind? "Poor . . . meek . . . mourner . . . hungerer after justice . . . merciful . . . clean of heart . . . peacemaker . . . persecuted . . . salt of the earth . . . light of the world." His Mother, beyond all others, answered to those titles. His Mother came first, in meriting the promised blessings.

In his ministry to women, the more closely Christ found them approaching to Mary in virtue, the more he esteemed them; the farther they withdrew from that model of all the virtues, the more deeply he pitied them, and the more solicitous he was to restore them to their rightful position. Mary Magdalen, at Bethany, imitative as she was of his Mother (because of her contemplative spirit), was declared to have chosen the better part. When she, in the hour of her conversion, had washed his feet, her charitable deed reminded him of a similiar office often performed by his Mother during the eighteen years of his hidden life. Speaking to the woman of Samaria, looking pityingly on the poor adulteress, reasoning with the ambitious mother of the two disciples, feeling for the widow of Naim, the Canaanite woman, and compassionating the women of Jerusalem, his own loved Mother loomed up as the great incomparable Woman; and if our own human hearts are at all—even at an infinite distance—an index of the human in Christ, he must have said, as we so often do: "Ah! No one is like to my Mother!

Would that all women were ! If they were, how changed for the better would be the state of the world ! ”

So Scriptural reticence with regard to Mary, once Christ’s public life began, far from suggesting effacement, rather points to her exalted dignity. Had she been brought into the limelight—so queenly and beautiful was she—she might have seemed invested with divinity—an idea foreign to the Christian mind, which always insists on her *createdness*. God alone is divine. To him alone divine honours are to be paid.

Christ, profound as was his love for his Mother, safeguarded this truth by publicly asserting the supreme majesty of the Godhead. Two events in the course of his ministry afforded him an opportunity : “ And his mother and brethren came unto him ; and they could not come at him for the crowd. And it was told him : Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee. Who answering said to them : My mother and my brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it ” (St Luke viii 19-21).

Although no importunity can be supposed on Mary’s part, Christ by these words reminds us that all human considerations, no matter how sacred, must yield when there is question of the direct service of God. He was then engaged in his official work of teaching and healing, so domestic interests had, perforce, to take a secondary place. His eternal Father’s business must take precedence of his duty to Mary his Mother.

We may take it for granted that Mary, far from intending to interrupt her divine Son in his ministrations, simply wished to inform him of her presence lest, in the dispersal of the large crowd, she should miss him. And who can tell but that she had a most pressing message to deliver ? In any case, our Blessed Lord made it clear that, in all the affairs of men, the business of the eternal Father must take the first place and that

they alone who faithfully perform it will rank as his brethren.

On another occasion "it came to pass . . . a certain woman from the crowd lifting up her voice said to him, Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it " (St Luke xi 27, 28).

In his heart, Christ could not but assent to the fervent praise bestowed on his Mother: "Ah yes! blessed indeed is that tabernacle wherein I reposed after the pronouncement of her fiat; blessed indeed the bosom at which I was nurtured; but even she, my Mother, great as were her privileges, was *more* blessed because of her ready compliance with the will of my eternal Father. In that docility of heart lay her greatest blessedness—would that all were thus like my Mother." This inner thought is, then, loudly voiced as in the above text. *Material blessings*, no matter how great, are vain unless accompanied with conformity to the will of God. It is the spirit that quickeneth: the spirit of docility to teaching—the spirit of zeal in reducing to practice the lessons learned from the teaching Church.

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Mary, widowed in a double sense, through the death of St Joseph and separation from her Son, modestly withdrew betimes from the large crowds that followed him; but she could not be ignorant of his triumphant progress, nor could she cease to be in constant union of soul with him. His human soul and hers were ever in tune with the eternal Father's will. The higher souls ascend in spirituality, the less are they wedded to human aids to love. Hence the separation of Mary from Jesus, during his public ministry, did not mean any estrangement of soul. Between Mother and

Son there was ever the link of divine love, which mocked at distance and counted neither hours nor days. Thus it was that, to Mary, the interval between the triumph at Cana and the tragedy of Calvary must have seemed very short as compared with the prolonged union of souls at Nazareth. It was meet that she whose fiat had given unto men a Saviour should be present to utter a mental "*Amen*" to Christ's last prayer: "*It is finished.*" From the eternal Father, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, she had received him. In the spirit of sacrifice she would give him back—thus co-operating in the work of Redemption as she had done in the Incarnation.

She whose meekness had held her back from the surging crowds that followed Jesus in the heyday of his success was now led by her heroism to the very foot of his Cross, only to find herself practically alone. "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother" (St John xix 25). Oh, how her maternal heart had been wrung during the preceding hours! What with sounds of trampling feet, the ominous glare of lanterns, clashing of arms, muffled reports of betrayal, denial and cowardly desertions, hoarse cries and clamours for blood, Mary had already suffered more than martyrdom. The sword of sorrow had indeed pierced her heart. Yet here she stands, fixed and immovable, to drink to the dregs the cup presented to her lips when the Archangel Gabriel descended on his mission. Her fiat, pronounced then, had never been taken back. It had singled her out as the New Eve, created to undo the evils wrought by the Old, and now there only remains the last few drops in her cup of sorrow: the sands of the life of her Son were running out, his body would be taken down, she should see him buried. . . .

And then ?

○ The dying Christ gives the answer: "Woman, be-

hold thy son " (St John xix 26). Peering through the darkness, Mary sees St John, the beloved disciple, and, in him, sees all of us.

Again Christ speaks, this time to the disciple, " Behold thy Mother " (St John xix 27), and, through John, he, our Saviour and our God, sees us.

So in that hour of tragedy Mary, the New Eve, becomes spiritual Mother of all the race. Then and for ever more she will be known, not only as the Mother of God, but as the Mother of Men. Her first-born was brought forth without pain. All of us were spiritually born of her in sorrow and affliction of spirit; but, while compassionating her in her sorrows, let us with hearts full of grateful joy thank God for his gift to us of such a Mother. Let us say with the saints: " I will rejoice and be glad; the Mother of God is my Mother; the Mother of the Judge is also the Mother of the criminal; the final judgment in our regard hangs upon a Mother's prayers and a Brother's word."

In taking, with her, a last look at the dead body of her divine Son, may we not surmise what passed through her mind? A vision of his juvenile loveliness contrasted with the predicted and, alas! verified disfigurement; sweet and tender memories of all his words and ways; of the intimate communications received during the sojourn at Nazareth and, finally, a resolve to be as true to her trust as the Mother of Men as she had been to the Holy Spirit, her Spouse, as Mother of God.

O Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Men, help us to be more and more worthy of our adoption as the brothers and sisters of Christ and as thine own spiritual children. From thy pure and holy hands we received the God-Man as our model, our guide, our brother, our friend and our Saviour; but inasmuch as he is also our

Mighty Judge, oh, deign, most glorious Virgin Mother, to teach us how to appease his anger and to merit his grace, so that we thy children may one day be privileged to rejoice with him, in the unity of the Father and the Holy Ghost, world without end.

PART III

MARY, MOTHER OF MEN

WRITING to the Galatians (iv 4-6), St Paul has the following: " But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; that he might redeem them that were under the law; *that we might receive the adoption of sons.* And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

From this it follows that what Christ is by nature—viz., the Son of God—we are to be by grace. The Incarnate Word made Man is to be the author of our divine generation. He is the only begotten of the Father, but—speaking of the Father—St Paul says: " Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son: *that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren* " (Rom. viii 29).

Brethren of Christ as we are by adoption, Mary, therefore, becomes our spiritual Mother. For, in the plan of redemption we could not, without her, have Christ as our Saviour. Association with him as our elder brother is inconceivable without the inclusion of his Mother as our Mother. We have seen that, while remaining ever a Virgin, she gave him a human nature. She was his Mother. He was her Son. In consenting to become the Mother of God she became our Mother also. He loved, honoured, and obeyed her. She was ever associated with his mysteries, from the Incarnation to the Crucifixion, pondering over them in her heart. In dying, he gave her to us to be our Mother in the order of grace, as she had been his in the

order of nature, thus confirming by his last legacy the gift that naturally followed on our adoption as his brethren. And having given her to us as our Mother, he invested her with all the qualities needful for the exercise of that important trust.

He could not do less for the spiritual Mother of the race than he had done for his disciples, nor could she do less than they. To them he had said: "Freely have you received, freely give" (St Matt. x 8). No one had received spiritual gifts in higher degree or in greater abundance than Mary. In her mission, then, as Mother she was, and is, expected by her divine Son to steward all her gifts for his greater glory and for the spiritual and temporal welfare of men.

We have reflected on her fidelity to her trust as Mother of God, and, if we scan the pages of Christian history, we shall find her equally faithful as the Mother of Men, from the time that she assisted at the cradling of the Church until now.

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"All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and *Mary*, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts i 14). Simple as are the foregoing words, they yet describe an important phase in the cradling of the infant Church.

Mary had known her divine Son for three and thirty years; had, during that period, pondered deeply over the mysteries that affected both their lives, and had been daily mental diarist of all his actions. Those assembled with her in prayer had known him for three years only, and had had little opportunity for digesting the many truths propounded by him. So Mary, in her interviews with the disciples, had much to reveal. Coming from such a trustworthy source—from *his* Mother and theirs—we are safe in saying that, like

docile children, they profited by her maternal disclosures. If they were chosen and appointed as witnesses, so was she, and oh, how much better than they was she equipped for the task! "And you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts i 8).

Mary alone could testify to the great primary mystery of the Incarnation, involving his miraculous conception and his birth. She alone could supply the details of the flight to, and the stay in, Egypt. No one but she could describe the nature of the hidden life at Nazareth after their return from exile. The Apostles knew Jesus only from the time of their call. He himself did not enlighten them on the details of his earlier life. He trusted the narration to Mary his Mother—to her who was to be Mother of the infant Church. Because of his manifestations of super-human power, they had believed in his divinity, but it was from Mary they learned the mystery of the Incarnation in its entirety. The Paraclete, it is true, came to teach them all truth, but Mary's words could not fail to impress them.

St Luke clearly points to such testimony, for he writes: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a narration of the things that have been accomplished among us, according as they have delivered them unto us, who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word: it seemed good to me also, *having diligently attained to all things from the beginning*, to write to thee" (St Luke i 1-3). Mary, presumably, was the sole living eyewitness from the beginning, for Zachary, Elizabeth, and St Joseph were, there is every reason to believe, no longer alive. She had been accustomed to keep "all those things in her heart," to "ponder" over them, and from

the rich storehouse of her memory she drew the matter which forms the earlier chapters of St Luke's Gospel, embodying the details of the infancy and childhood of Jesus. So long as her divine Son lived, her self-effacement had caused her to seal her lips. After his glorious Ascension, the time had come to speak. And who can doubt that her stay under the roof of St John contributed to the sublimity of his treatment of the divine mysteries, even as her memorising had helped the lucidity of St Luke?

Speaking of the Incarnation, Cardinal Wiseman says: "Take away Mary's contribution to the Gospel testimony, efface her testimony to Christianity, and you find not simply a link broken, but the very fastening of the whole chain wanting; not merely a gap, or a break, made in the structure, but the foundation gone . . ." (*Essays*, vol. i, p. 305). In this connection, the learned Cardinal calls her "Evangelist of the Evangelists, and the Apostle to the Apostles," and writes that "her place is the very first in the order of Gospel evidences, and so in the economy of faith" (p. 308). "She will lay the very groundwork of the Evangelical narrative. Whatever gratitude the Church bears towards the collectors and preservers of our first sacred records is due in signal manner to her. Whatever of credibility, authority, and truthfulness is warranted by Christian belief, to the witnesses of what constitutes the basis of faith, must be peculiarly extended to her. Nor may we doubt the justness of her title in the Church—Queen of Apostles" (pp. 313-314).

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Mary was the dispenser of the first grace bestowed after the Incarnation, for at the sound of her salutation the infant John leaped in the womb of his mother, St Elizabeth. The grace of sanctification came from

the yet unborn Word Incarnate, but it was dispensed through Mary his Mother. She was likewise the dispenser of the first temporal grace. Christ, her Son, performed the miracle at Cana, but it was suggested by Mary. So it is reasonable to believe that her gift of dispensing the graces of God, far from decreasing with the lapse of time, would rather increase, because of her close proximity to her divine Son after her glorious Assumption. Christ is our sole Mediator. While Mary's mediation is entirely secondary and subordinate to that of her divine Son, it, nevertheless, transcends that of all the angels and saints and constitutes an altogether unique privilege; for no saint has had the intimate relationship with Christ that was accorded to Mary. Not only was she his Mother, but as he was the New Adam she was the New Eve, in relationship with the two actions—transgression and reparation. As Eve cannot be dissociated from Adam, so Mary can never be dissociated from Jesus, the God-Man. The New Adam suggests the New Eve, and *vice versa*. But while the old Adam and Eve were in equality of nature, the New Adam *infinitely* excels the New Eve, inasmuch as he is God and she is his creature. But, all the same, the dignity of motherhood conferred on her—Mother of God and Mother of Men—can never be withdrawn. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. xv 22). But as all men die because of Eve's co-operation with Adam, so all men live through Mary's co-operation with Christ, to whom she gave a body for his sacrifice.

Thus it is that we never misunderstand the titles given to her of Liberatrix, Reparatrix, Co-operatrix; for by these terms we simply mean that she, by her obedience, gave unto us a Redeemer, to repair the evils caused by the primal disobedience. As Eve co-operated with Adam in the Fall, so the New Eve

co-operates with the New Adam in redemption. "By one woman death has come to us, by another woman life; perdition by Eve, salvation by Mary" (St Augustine, *De Sym. ad Catechum.*). "Eve was a cause of death to men, because death entered into the world by her; but Mary has been a cause of life to them, for life has been given to us by her, and by her the Son of God has come into this world" (St Epiphanius, *Adv. Haeres.*, lib. 3, *Haeres.*, 78).

The co-operation of Mary adds absolutely nothing to the sacrifice of Christ, and in no sense are her merits applied to us in order to our sanctification, but only the merits of Jesus Christ, for he alone is the true cause, the entire, the necessary, the fully sufficient, abundant, and even superabundant cause of all our justification, of all our sanctification. Yet the reality of Mary's co-operation is admirably expressed by St Thomas, who, in considering the reasonableness of the Annunciation that she was to conceive Christ, says it was becoming (1) that she should be informed in mind concerning him before conceiving him in the flesh; (2) that she might be a certain witness of this mystery, being instructed therein by God; (3) that she might offer to God the free gift of her obedience . . . ; (4) in order to show that there is a certain spiritual wedlock between the Son of God and human nature. Wherefore in the Annunciation the *Virgin's consent was besought in lieu of the entire human race*" (*Summa*, 3 P., q. xxx, art. 1). The Redemption that followed on the Incarnation, with all its fruits, was wrought wholly and solely by the Redeemer alone, yet Mary's co-operation, as above, was most real, formal, and efficacious, inasmuch as she willed all that God willed, *from beginning to end*, in connection with the work of Redemption. Daily experience proves that souls who are most devout to Mary, as co-operatrix with Christ,

excel all others in the solidity and tenderness of their devotion to Christ, the one true Redeemer.

It is Mary's co-operation which forms the foundation of her spiritual motherhood. God, in his wisdom, conceived that his glory would be enhanced in the supernatural order, as in the natural, by giving unto men a Mother; and, as we have seen, our adoption as brethren of Christ makes her truly our spiritual Mother. In the first section we saw how the love of mother, far from undermining the rights of the father, rather built up and safeguarded them. In the supernatural order, with such a Mother as Mary, this truth is more than amply verified. The more God's Mother is honoured, the more intensely God himself is honoured, because of his infinitely greater title to the homage of his creatures. The ardent lover of Mary knows and feels that Mary's God has an infinitely greater right to his love, and he is also assured that Mary, his Mother, will loyally help him to yield it.

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The work begun by Mary at the cradling of the Church has been continued by her ever since; for her mission as Mother was limited neither by time nor by development of doctrine. Indeed, development of doctrine in the Church has more solidly established her right and title to the devotion of the children of God. She was to be the Mother of Men in all time and even into eternity, inasmuch as for all eternity she will bear the title of Mother of God. So, from the beginning of Christianity, during the life of the Church in the Catacombs, and through its vicissitudes in all ages and in all climes, Mary, as Mother of the Church, has, in spirit, been present at councils as she was bodily present at the first meetings of the early Christians. Her aid has ever been invoked, and never in vain, for,

in the struggles of the Church with Satan, it has ever been mindful that she was the woman divinely appointed to crush the serpent's head. All history testifies to this, inasmuch as hydra-headed heresy has invariably struck at Christ, directly or indirectly, through Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of Men.

Her influence as Mother of the Church and Men has ever been made manifest by the exaltation of the virginal state, and by the elevation of woman to a level she had not previously attained. The extraordinary increase of religious Orders for both sexes, and the abbatial powers extended even to women, point to the recognition of Mary as Mother, Teacher, and Guide of the children of God. There was ever a tacit understanding that, spiritually as well as corporally, men needed a mother whose sweetness and tenderness, humility and constancy, should bring out what was best in them and, in a way, temper the seeming asperity of the eternal law. The God who gave such a mother could not but know that she would be loved and honoured; and the mere fact that the all-seeing God gave her unto men proves that he meant her to be thus cherished. And although men were always aware that in all their needs they could directly approach the eternal Father, through Jesus Christ his Son, they nevertheless rightly reasoned that their supplications would be all the more powerful if aided by her without whose obedience and humility they could not, in the plan of Redemption, have had the gift of a Saviour.

And how could any believer doubt but that she who, in the Incarnation, was made the Spouse of the Holy Ghost would, in the course of ages, dispose the hearts of her children to be receptive of his gifts and fruits? She is ever saying, as she said at Cana: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye."

Has not the whole world re-echoed with this cry of Mary? Whenever the Church legislates in the name of God, Mary says: "Do it!" When, with the blessing and approval of the Church, men or women feel inspired from on high to found an Order, to go forth on missionary work, or to perform spiritual or corporal works of mercy at home, Mary repeats her maternal advice: "Whatsoever the Holy Spirit has said to you, do ye."

To develop this truth would require more space than can be afforded, but if our readers reconsider all that was said in the first section with regard to the solicitude of the God-fearing mother in all that affects the good of the household, the honour of the father, and the welfare of her children, they can, without fear of exaggeration, credit Mary, in the spiritual order, with a solicitude far greater and indescribably more efficacious. For that is her divinely appointed mission—to be the Mother of Men in all their needs, especially those of a spiritual nature.

In family life, as we have seen, the mother is the dispenser of its hereditary and traditional bounties. She is ever animated with a burning desire to uphold the honour and to promote the glory of the household. Its spiritual and temporal wants are, to her, a real obsession. To fit out the children for their various vocations is her constant care, and, as long as life lasts (being of one mind and heart with the father, the head of the household), she says to each: "Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye. In vain shall you profess love of me, your mother, unless you are primarily loyal to him without whom neither you nor I could enjoy our mutual relationship."

Thus has Mary thought, spoken, and acted adown the ages. She is the most favoured child of the eternal Father, the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of

Jesus the God-Man (who is our elder brother), and her voice has ever been ringing in the ears of men, collectively and individually, saying: "Whatsoever the eternal Father says, do ye; whatsoever the Holy Spirit suggests, do ye; whatsoever my divine Son says, do ye; whatsoever the one true Church says, do ye: for Jesus has said, 'He that heareth you heareth me.'"

Now the Church, in every successive age, has favoured and approved devotion to Mary the Mother of God. She has multiplied her Feasts, sanctioned her invocation in the Liturgy, in litanies, and in other approved devotions; has made clear her position in the plan of Redemption; patronised her shrines—notably her shrine at Lourdes; struck medals in her honour and most richly indulgenced her rosaries and scapulars, all in harmony with the precept: *Honour thy mother*. "Honour Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Men." Thus speaks the Church! We know the result. God's glory has increased; the Incarnation and Redemption have been better understood and more deeply appreciated; the sacramental system has borne more abundant fruit; virginity has blossomed on the one hand, and, on the other, Christian homes have been purged of worldliness and modelled on the Holy Home of Nazareth. These wonderful benefits are largely due to the maternal care of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Men, who is ever insistent on the children of the vast household of the faith doing God's adorable will, through obedience to his Spouse, the one true Church. "Whatsoever the Church says, do ye, for the Church is the mouthpiece of my divine Son, Jesus Christ."

If this were grasped by our earnest non-Catholic friends who, of late years, profess devotion to Mary, they could not fail to see that an essential link is wanting in the chain of their loyalty to God. For their pro-

fession of devotion is vain unless that link is supplied by their submission to the one true Church. Mary says: "Whatsoever my divine Son says, do ye." In saying, "He that heareth you, heareth me," he has undoubtedly founded an infallible teaching Church. True devotion to Mary is, therefore, impossible apart from union with the Church founded by her divine Son. True devotion to her leads infallibly to unity and, moreover, to sanctity or holiness of life.

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It is undeniable that every thoughtful man, born of woman, must needs picture to his mind what woman should be. In the early stages of life, the mother who bore him fills his eye and he regards her as the queen of her sex, no matter how glaring, in the eyes of others, her defects may be. Later on in life, his reading and observation lead him to conjure up greater possibilities. He does not necessarily thrust his mother from her position in his heart, but in his mind he may picture more radiant beauty, more appealing attractiveness, and greater splendour of virtue. Short of this, it would be well-nigh impossible for man to sever himself from the hitherto cherished leading-strings that bound him to his mother. Even the untutored man nourishes deep and strong affection for his mother, and even when his ideals are raised he still clings tenaciously to the instinct put into his heart by the Creator, who, in asking, "Can a mother forget her child?" seems also to ask, "Can a child forget its mother?"

As I write, I have before me the letter of a youth, aged twenty-three, who from far-off Canada seeks information regarding his origin. He writes: "I shall be most grateful if you can send me a copy of my birth-lines, for it is an awful burden to go through life and not know who you are. Let me know whether it

be good or bad. If my mother was bad, I shall never condemn her. *I will always remember she is my mother.* I only hope to God she is not dead. If she is dead, then try and locate my father. If I can do them a good turn I will." For sheer nobility of sentiment I think it would be impossible to beat the foregoing.

So we conclude that man must needs, sooner or later in life, have an *ideal* woman in his mind. God, through the teaching Church, leaves no man in doubt as to who she is. From his earliest years, the Catholic is trained to look up to Mary as God's masterpiece of femininity. The Catholic mother joins Mary's name to that of Jesus, and her child's first lisplings are repetitions of those hallowed names. In his Guild, later on, he is taught the value of Mary's intercession in obtaining the gift of purity, and in cherishing reverence for Mary's sex. It is absolutely impossible to overrate the importance of this for society in general and for man in particular. The well-trained Catholic boy has an inherent respect for womankind, not on mere natural grounds (as must be the case outside Catholic circles), but on clearly defined supernatural grounds. Mary, Mother of God, is set up as the unimpeachable Ideal Woman, and the youth is led to look for imitation of her virtues in all the members of her sex. This being so, it is alien to his Catholic instinct (unless indeed he is sadly perverted) to depreciate womankind, or, by word or deed, to drag her from the pedestal to which association with Mary has raised her. His secret hope is that, in the eyes of God, his mother, his sisters, and his female friends approximate to Mary in their virtues; and his firm resolve is never to assail that virtue by any unhallowed act. Should he contemplate marriage, the idea of making one who knows not and loves not Mary the mother of his children is altogether foreign to his mind.

From all this it can be gathered how cruel and how unhallowed it is, on the part of heretical sects, to drag Mary from the position God meant her to have in the affections of his rational creatures. Not only does it mean a loss to Christianity, but it means a loss to society, to the home, to womankind, and especially to man; for if man is deprived of the ideal set up by God himself, whereto shall he turn for one that will elevate and purify? In vain will such an ideal be sought in the cold, sensuous, selfish world.

Even as man has need of an ideal to save him from shipwreck of his virtue in his relationship with women, so woman herself has need of a model. In all the vicissitudes of his chosen people, God set up models for the imitation of the women of Israel. Their names must be familiar to our readers: Ruth, Rachel, Rebecca, Sarah, Miriam, Judith, Esther—all of them, in one way or another, types of Mary, but ah! so inferior to her in their privileges and so far behind her in their perfections. Mary is the model set up in the New Law to whom the eyes of women must turn until Christ, her divine Son, comes to judge the living and the dead: model of virginity, model of motherhood, model of heroism, model of humility, model of obedience, model of patience, model of divine love.

Outside the Catholic Church, who, as a rule, are regarded as the models of womankind? An Elizabeth, a Victoria, a Florence Nightingale, a Grace Darling, a Mrs. Booth, a Nurse Cavell! Mary, Mother of God and model of true womanhood, has no place! Is this not an insult to God almost crying to heaven for vengeance? And are we not daily witnesses to the working out of the curse? For if women model not their lives on that of Mary, but rather on that of some society heroine, and if men base their ideals of woman-kind only on what they see in contemporary women,

how can the sexes rise above the animality of their fallen nature—how can they mutually edify ?

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How different the attitude of the one true Church, which has ever deemed it its bounden duty to present Mary as the divinely appointed model of womankind and, in proportion to woman's increasing liberty, is more and more insistent on this truth. In availing herself of modern facilities for self-improvement, for public positions and offices of trust, she is to remember Mary's humility, obedience, prudence, and self-respect, which, notwithstanding *her* unexampled privileges and honours, remained intact to the end. Only thus can woman hope to please the God who so exalted Mary; only thus can she hope to win the favour of those men whose ideal of woman, far from being formed on "Society" lines, is set up on divinely appointed lines, all visioned in Mary. If society is to be saved from itself, if the world is to be regenerated, women must be prepared to take their share in the work. Such is God's will, as is evident from the position held by the Mother of his Son. But, in the work of regeneration, Mary must be their model. Even as she co-operated with Christ in Redemption, so must women co-operate with men in working out the salvation of the world.

Mary's influence on home-life is not less necessary, and where it is reverently and constantly sought it is always salutary. The husband and father who loves Mary cannot deal irreverently with the wife of his bosom and the mother of his children. While he regards himself almost as Mary's slave, it will be abhorrent to him to make a slave of his wife. The wife and mother who honours Mary will ever recall to mind that Mary's power was founded on her humility and docility, and that her own position in the household will be secure if she strives to lay down like founda-

tions. Far from becoming intoxicated by the modern craze for "equality," she will, through the self-evident results of her humility, realise that her husband grows in his worship of her, and that her children adore her. In such a home there is no need to remind the inmates of the obligation of respecting the laws of nature, the positive laws of God, and the precepts of the Church; for they conceive that Mary is ever saying to them: "Whatsoever my divine Son, through the Church, says, do ye."

But it is especially when we think of the afflicted that we find Mary's excellence as Mother of Men brought into highest relief. She, the Woman of Sorrows, is essentially the comfortress of the afflicted. She whose soul was pierced with the sword is full of compassion for all who share her griefs. The heart of the average mother goes out most to the children who are either mentally defective or corporally stricken; and if dangers threaten their souls she cannot rest until spiritual relief is found. In these respects, no mother can hope to excel Mary, Mother of Men. Thus it is that the Catholic instinct leads all of us to have instant recourse to her in all spiritual and temporal wants. As she was, under God, instrumental in obtaining spiritual and temporal favours in Elizabeth's home and at Cana, so shall it be to the end of time, and in these latter days the spiritual and temporal miracles wrought at Lourdes supply irrefutable evidence in support of this conviction. Nay, each soul possesses its own secret record of Mary's aid in many an anxious hour of temptation and, it may be, of rescue from the pit of sin when hope was well-nigh lost.

Let us, therefore, be ceaseless and tireless in studying the wonderful life of Mary, Mother of God and our Mother. It is the most fruitful of all studies in helping us to understand Christ the God-Man, her

divine Son; in leading us to the glorification of God the Father, who has made her Mother of Men; and in making us docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost her Spouse. The study should be accompanied by the daily exercise of childlike devotions in her honour, by the wearing of some badge blessed by the Church, but above all by the close imitation of her virtues and example, according to our state of life, as a mark of our gratitude to God for having blessed us with such a Mother.

Happy they who, with perfect confidence in her, find themselves inspired by God to become her very slaves, offering up all that they do and all that shall be done for them, in life or after death, into her pure hands, to be dispensed by her according to her maternal pleasure. What is done in the homes of man by generous children, who surrender all they have into the hands of a trusted mother, cannot be less meritorious in the household of the faith, wherein Mary, Mother of God, is also the tender, venerated, trusted, and faithful Mother of Men.

Such trustful clients of Mary say: "O God, from whose generous hands all blessings come, we thank thee for having given unto us, as our Mother, Mary, the Mother of thy divine Son: thy own peerless and immaculate daughter, and the Spouse of thy Holy Spirit. Out of the gratitude we owe thee for this priceless gift we, with the utmost confidence in her maternal care, surrender into her hands all our works, prayers, and sufferings, as well as all the indulgences that we may gain or that may ever be gained for us—professing that as all of them are, through the merits of Christ, the fruit of her most humble and docile fiat, she has, indeed, well merited the right to dispose of them according to her motherly discretion. We wish ever to remain at her feet as her humble slaves,

feeling assured that the golden chains of love which bind us to her will save us from the fetters of sin which, alas ! when we loved her less, made us slaves of Satan. O happy exchange ! No longer slaves of the serpent, but rather slaves of Mary, who crushed the serpent's head : slaves of Mary, in order that through her powerful intercession we may become free, with the freedom whereby Christ made us free."

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